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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE STORIES OF WOMEN WHO WERE SEXUALLY ABUSED AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

ANN MARIE HEMINGSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
FAMILY STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1994

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#19, 10245 - 116 Street,
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DATE: April 22/94

The Story Teller

When I was a child I was the teller of stories. I spoke words which were the web of my experience. I spoke my truth and I knew what I was going to be. My proclamation was to be a teller of stories. As I grew up my words were no longer there. Lost was the dream to be a teller of stories. Such sadness for a lost dream. Then I remembered my proclamation in a dream. You were destined to be a teller of stories. Reclaim, reclaim, reclaim were the words which echoed in my dream.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE STORIES OF WOMEN WHO WERE SEXUALLY ABUSED AS CHILDREN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY submitted by Ann Marie Hemingson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE IN FAMILY STUDIES.

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Susan McDaniel

Cheryl Malmo

Cheryl Malmo/External Member

Date April 21, 1994

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to all survivors of incest, for it contains within it the hopes of liberation and freedom to be who we were all meant to be.

ABSTRACT

The present study described the experiences of women who were sexually abused in childhood by family members. Using a feminist phenomenological approach, nine women who had experienced intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse were interviewed and asked to: (a) describe their experiences of being sexually abused as a child, (b) to describe their experiences of coming to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse occurred, and (c) to describe their experiences of self-blame. From the analysis, three macro-themes emerged reflecting three distinct sets of experiences: (a) the experience of being a survivor; (b) the experience of being victimized; and (c) the experience of women as they come to terms with the question of why the abuse occurred. The experience of being a survivor and the experience of being victimized reflected two parts of the experience of being sexually abused. The experience of being a survivor reflected the themes of becoming aware of the experience, believing, making connections, working through, commitment to the process of healing, turning point-stopping the abuse, deriving meaning,and moving on. The experience of being victimized reflected the themes of losses, objectification and negative effects of the abuse. The findings suggested that the experience of self-blame was part of the experience of coming to terms with the question of why the abuse occurred. The experience of coming to terms with the question of why the abuse occurred reflected the themes of self-blame, blaming the abuser, the family, and cultural explanations. The relationship of these themes to other literature are examined and directions for future research are suggested for the professional community. Possible implications for the professional community are discussed.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. B. Skrypnek thesis supervisor, whose ongoing support, encouragement, and academic expertise made it possible for me to complete this work. Appreciation is extended to the members of the thesis committee, Dr. D. Kieren, Dr. S. McDaniel, and Dr. C. Malmo for their helpful participation. Finally, I wish to express special thanks to the women who volunteered their time to participate in the study. I was deeply touched by each woman's depth and resilience.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The stories I told as a child were born out of my experiences and were not judged as to their worthiness. I did not judge myself to be a good or bad story teller. I simply was a story teller. Like the stories which I told as a child, the motivation for doing this research was born out of my own personal experience. The experience of being a survivor of incest. My story of incest began when I was a child and was lost for a long time. I regained my story approximately 5 years ago when I remembered the childhood sexual abuse and hence began to piece together my life. Trying to make sense out of what had happened to me was a major task. It took all of my energy to complete this task.

Explaining what happened to myself was a journey which involved examining myself, my family, and the societal conditions which surrounded my family; not a small task to say the least. In examining myself, at first I found so much evidence that was reinforcing a sense of being defective. As I rejected this information, I started to look at the family in which I was raised. While this explained some of the things I experienced, it did not explain the totality of my experience. For example, I heard many other women speak of their experience of being sexually abused as children. I found that this information could not be explained solely in terms of my family. This information necessitated the formulation of a new world view. The new world view explained not only what I experienced, but sought to explain how it was that so many other children experienced childhood sexual abuse. These new explanations involved a view which examined the politics of gender and what it means to be a woman in our present society. This was the way in which I finally could understand my experience.

Since I started to remember my lost story, I wanted to hear the stories that other women told. I was very curious about this phenomenon which had occurred to me. So I started to read all that I could about the subject. My reading included many things, but mainly focused on how women explained why they were sexually abused. My focus was on of how women perceived the issues of who was responsible for the abuse. The more I read, the more it occurred to me that women who had been sexually abused, were largely treated as if their explanations for the abuse were static. That is, the explanations that women provided were described in a categorical manner at a specific point in time, without reference to the fact that for many women, even to recover the memories of sexual abuse necessitated the filling in of critical memory gaps (Lebowitz, Harvey & Herman, 1993). For example, several studies grouped explanations into the categories of self, abuser/others, society/world, and chance (Gold, 1986; Hoagwood, 1990; Morrow, 1991). Moreover, these studies sought to find out if the women who blamed themselves were poorly adjusted (Gold, 1986; Hoagwood, 1990; Morrow, 1991). Consequently, self-blame was described in association to adjustment. Very little of what I read described my experience. I was curious to find out if other women experienced what I had experienced.

My questions were derived from my experience and the lack of literature which described the experience of women who were sexually abused in childhood. Generally, there was a lack of literature which described the experiences of women who were sexually abused. More specifically, there was a lack of literature which described the experiences of women as they struggled to come to terms with the question of why they were sexually abused. As will be shown in "Chapter II: Literature Review" there was simply a gap in the literature, as most of the literature assumed the stance of the impartial observer, reflecting only what was observed and not the subjective experiential viewpoint of women. Using my own experience and the knowledge which I gained from the literature, I formulated three research questions. First I sought to gain a better understanding of women's experiences of being sexually abused as a child. Second I sought to learn about their experiences of asking and answering the question of why they were sexually abused. And finally, I sought to gain a understanding of women's experiences of self-blame. I knew that attempting to address three questions was a huge undertaking, however, the questions all appeared to be linked together so that answers from one question helped to solve answers to the other questions. A hermeneutical phenomenological approach was used in this research as it allowed me to focus on the experiences of women. This methodology, the approach to data collection, and the approach to data analysis is described in Chapter III.

Chapters IV and V present the major findings of the study. Chapter IV intends to describe the general experiences of women as they told their stories of childhood sexual abuse. The themes which emerged from their stories reflect two different types of experiences: the experiences of being victimized and the experiences of being a survivor. Chapter V describes the experience of women as they answered why, which represents the answers to the second and third question. Two major themes emerged from the data and these are referred to as the beginning and providing the context for the abuse. The beginning describes how women first start to question why, while providing the context for the abuse describes the answers women provided. Self-blame, the abuser, the family, and society represent the answers which women provided.

And the last chapter, Chapter VI, summarizes the major findings of this research, describes how these findings fit with other research and clinical knowledge, and identifies how this research has gone beyond previous research and has added to our understanding of the lives of women who experienced childhood sexual abuse. Directions for further research and implications for the professional community are also included.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As my own story unfolded, I also wondered what was written and known on the subject of childhood sexual abuse apart from what I knew in my own experience. That is, I wondered how others described childhood sexual abuse. As my search for knowledge started I noticed that what was known was told by different groups of people in very different ways. The researchers, clinicians, and survivors all had different ways in which they spoke about the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse. So I read what was known, integrating what I knew with what was known by others.

Knowledge about childhood sexual abuse can be organized into what is known about the prevalence, societal awareness, what is known about the adjustment of survivors and what is known about the factors which affect adjustment. After finding out what is known, I am able in the final section to discuss what is not known about the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse.

A. What Is Known About the Prevalence

To begin with, the known prevalence of childhood sexual abuse is astonishingly high. The National Population Study found that one in two adult women and one in three men had at some point in their lives experienced sexual abuse (Report of the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth, 1984). Four out of five of these individuals had experienced the incidents when they were children or teenagers. Local surveys have provided more conservative figures for the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse; for women the range is from 21% to 28% (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; McKenzie, 1991) and for men, the figure was 6.5% (McKenzie, 1991). American incidence rates for childhood sexual assault follow the same pattern as do Canadian prevalence rates. Rates for women are consistently higher than for men. Depending on the study, the rates for women are 2 to 9 times higher than for men (Bagley & King,1990; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, !990; Russell, 1983).

These general patterns of prevalence for childhood sexual abuse persisted when I looked at the rates for intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse. More women experience intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse than men (Herman, 1981). One tenth of all males who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse; whereas, nearly three tenths of all women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have experienced intrafamilial abuse (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1989). Being female places one at greater risk for experiencing childhood sexual abuse both within the family and outside the family.

As I continued to read, I discovered that the range of intrafamilial sexual abuse for females was recorded as ranging from 3% to 16% (Alter-Reid, Gibbs, Lachenmeyer, Sigal & Massoth, 1986). However, I was unable to find a similar range for men. I soon discovered that more studies had surveyed and recorded the prevalence rate for intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse for females than for males (Alter-Reid et al., 1986). This in no way lessens the significance or magnitude of the problem for males or for society. However, this lack of research may be a result of the stereotype of male strength and the difficulty that researchers and clinicians have had in dealing with the violation of the male stereotype of strength and invulnerability. The stereotype of male strength may also serve to deter victimized men from asking for help. While male hegemony appears to have victimized both sexes, it does appear to prefer female children. In light of the high prevalence rates for childhood sexual abuse, it seems essential for professionals to investigate the area of childhood sexual abuse. In particular, the differing rates for female and male childhood sexual abuse, and the differing implications that sexual abuse may have for females and males (Lisak, 1991), necessitated the narrowing of the focus of this study to females. Since I am familiar with the issues which are relevant to women, having the advantage of the insider's view, I chose to study women. This was of course much more meaningful to me, as my experience is of course from a woman's point of view.

B. Societal Awareness

Our current awareness of childhood sexual abuse as a prevalent problem in society is quite recent. If I were to take you on a journey back in time to the end of the nineteenth century, to 1896, I would be able to introduce you to Sigmund Freud, the famous physician who presented his seduction theory to the professional community. According to this theory, psychological trauma was incurred as a result of the sexual assault adults experienced when they were children. The seduction theory was supported by 18 case studies. It seems as if the professional community was not ready to accept work on the seduction theory and he withdrew his theory (Rush, 1980).

Now if I were to continue my journey back in time, and visit the private domain of Freud in October of 1896, I would come to better understand the reason why the seduction theory was rescinded. This date marks the death of Freud's father. Finding the death of his father traumatic, and engaging in a period of self psychoanalysis, he discovered his own father may have been a perpetrator of sexual abuse. Resolution of Freud's inner turmoil occurred as he understood the suspicion of his father was mere fantasy (Rush, 1980). The seduction theory was now replaced by the Oedipus Complex, not an unlikely outcome given the personal relevance, personal threat of the seduction theory, and the societal resistance of his time.

The impact that the seduction theory had on the professional community was significant. For many years society struggled to ignore the seduction of children as a common phenomenon and to understand how it impacts on the psychological development of children. To illustrate this struggle, I will use a classic example of early research, the study of Bender and Grugett which was published 42 years ago. Bender and Grugett (1952) conducted a longitudinal case study of ten girls and four boys. They argued that there was no evidence that sexual activity with adults produced a negative impact on the lives of four of the individuals who had been sexually abused as children. For the other ten individuals, who had more serious psychopathology, the authors concluded that the children's sexual activity was prompted either in response to parental deprivation or to the children's "deficiency in ego control" ...(p. 828). The authors not only denied the existence of any impact on the development of the children, but also blamed the children for being sexually abused.

Continuing my journey back in time, I will now take you to the end of the seventies, when authors such as Butler (1978) and Herman (1981) published the results of their studies dispelling the myths that intrafamilial sexual abuse was rare and innocuous. As a result of these ground breaking studies, we now know that the sexual abuse of children occurs with enough regularity and with sufficiently serious sequelae that a strong case for further investigating the impact of sexual abuse can be been made. [1]

C. What is Known About the Adjustment of Survivors

What is known today about intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse and the adjustment of survivors of childhood sexual abuse? First, we know that the universal taboo of incest is defunct, for what is universal is the existence of incest and not the prohibition (Demause, 1991). As well, we have empirical and clinical literature to provide testimony of the adjustment problems which befall survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Clinicians have for years noted the negative effects of sexual abuse. For example, Engel, an American therapist, has noted that survivors display a plethora of symptoms (Engel, 1989). These symptoms can be divided into five categories as follows: (a) damage to the self-esteem, (b) relationship problems, (c) sexual problems, (d) difficulties in expressing emotions, and (e) psychologically based physical symptoms and illness (Engel, 1989). From her clinician viewpoint, Engel offers wisdom from her many years of counselling, stating that the symptoms tell a story in and of themselves, often about the abuse the survivor has endured. So symptoms are not just regarded as indicators of pathology, but are like markers left from the abuse. Similarly, Canadian clinicians, Malmo and Laidlaw (1993), espouse a similar view of symptoms. They state that symptoms should not be viewed as indicators of pathology as they are often coping strategies which were initially used in the original sexual abuse.

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[1] To risk the oversimplification of society's struggle to accept the sexual abuse of children as being resolved is erroneous, for this is far from true. This is exemplified by a recent study where only 36% of teachers and social workers presented with fictitious case studies of father-daughter incest perceived the female child as having no responsibility for the sexual abuse (Johnson, Owens, Dewey & Eisenberg, 1990).

What can be said from the viewpoint of research is insightful and informative, but often sterile as the human dimension of warmth or hope that clinicians offer is missing. Research has depicted dismal portraits of survivors. For example, one study noted that even within a select group of professionally employed women, survivors of childhood sexual abuse demonstrated a degree of sequelae when measured on standardized testing and compared to a similar group of professionally employed women with no history of sexual abuse (Elliott & Briere, 1992). These findings are not unusual and represent what could be labelled the unequivocal results from these types of studies (Finkelhor & Browne, 1988). Another study found that having a history of sexual abuse was a significant predictor of depression, poor self-esteem and sexual maladjustment (Bagley & McDonald, 1984). The evidence was overwhelming. There was a clear pattern of greater psychological impairment for survivors of childhood sexual abuse compared to the normal population (Finkelhor & Browne, 1988). From the viewpoint of research, survivors of childhood sexual abuse can not escape the effects of sexual abuse.

Presented below are descriptions of the plethora of symptoms which have been documented by both the research and clinical communities. Symptoms have been grouped into the categories of: (a) impact on physical, sexual and psychological functioning; and, (b) psychiatric conditions.

Impact on Physical, Sexual and Psychological Functioning

Survivors are affected in numerous ways by their sexual abuse. The following reviews those aspects of physical, sexual and psychological functioning commonly associated with a history of childhood sexual abuse.

Physical Symptoms

Studies which focus specifically on the physical symptoms associated with a history of childhood sexual abuse are few. One study which focused on the physical symptoms was conducted by Felitti (1991) through an American health maintenance organization. The population which used the health maintenance organization, was described as being mostly white, middle-class and employed individuals. A medical questionnaire was administered to all individuals who came for a complete medical evaluation. One of the questions asked both males and females if they had ever been raped or sexually molested; 131 of the respondents who answered yes to this question became the participants of the study. Individuals who experienced any type of sexual abuse were all grouped together in the data analysis. Therefore, the analysis did not refer solely to just survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The study included a control group, matched on the variables of age and sex. The average length of time between the study and the victimization was more than 3 decades. Ninety-six percent of the individuals who participated in the study were female. Findings of the study indicated that 60% of the study group were 50 pounds or more overweight as compared to 28% of the control group. The weight problem was more severe for the study group than for the control group, as 25% of the subjects who were abused were 100 or more pounds overweight as compared to 6% of the control group. Doctor office visits were higher for 22% of the study group as compared to the control group. Gastrointestinal distress was a common physical complaint for 64% of the study group as compared to 39% of the control group. Headaches of all types were reported by 45% of the study group as compared to 25% of the control group.

While Felitti's (1991) study did not separate out the different groups of sexually abused persons, it was apparent that headaches, gastrointestinal distress and obesity were more common among persons who were sexually abused. Other studies have reported that incest survivors can experience hysterical symptoms such as fainting, paralysis of limbs, hysterical seizures and chronic pelvic pain (Albach & Everard, 1992; Bagley & King, 1990; Meiselman, 1990).

It is obvious that the number of studies in the area of physiological functioning were limited, but the evidence for the existence of health problems among survivors was no less significant. This is, of course, an area which requires more attention from the medical community.

Sexual Functioning

Although clinicians have for years suspected that childhood sexual abuse has an effect on the sexuality of survivors, researchers are now documenting the effect. Several studies have noted that the aftermath of childhood sexual abuse does permeate sexual functioning. Both psychological and physical functioning are affected by the sexual symptoms which survivors experience.[2] What type of sexual difficulties do survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience? Sexual outcomes that women survivors experience have included periods with high numbers of sexual partners (labelled promiscuity) (Herman, 1981; Tsai, Feldman-Summers & Edgar, 1979; Westerlund, 1992), desire dysfunction (Becker, Skinner, Abel & Cichon, !986; Westerlund, 1992), arousal dysfunction (Becker et al., !986; Westerlund, 1992), intromission problems (Becker et al., !986; Westerlund, 1992), fear of sex (Becker et al., !986; Westerlund, 1992), other areas of sexual functioning such as sexual fantasies (Westerlund, 1992), orgasmic problems (Becker et al., !986; Westerlund, 1992), prostitution (Bagley & Young, 1987), altered body perceptions (Westerlund, 1992), and reproductive difficulties (Westerlund, 1992).

The number of survivors who reported having high numbers of sexual partners varied from one third to one-half of all survivors, depending on the population being studied (Herman, 1981; Westerlund, 1992). For example, one third of a clinical group of incest survivors (Herman, 1981) and one half of a sample of incest survivors who were members of a self-help group (Westerlund, 1992) reported a high numbers of sexual partners. For 21% of the respondents in

---

[2] It is recognized that sexual functioning encompasses both physical and psychological components. However, sexual functioning is presented in a separate section in order to provide a more integrated picture of the impact of abuse on survivors' sexual functioning.

Westerlund's study, there was an alternation between periods of "promiscuity" and periods of celibacy (Westerlund, 1992). Survivors did not permanently adopt a behavior pattern of acting out their lack of awareness of sexual boundaries, but rather this lasted for a period of time. In comparison to the general population, both clinical and nonclinical groups of survivors reported higher numbers of sexual partners than the control group, which was consistent with survivors lack of awareness of sexual boundaries (Tsai et al., 1979). Specifically, 43% of the clinical group, 17% of nonclinical group of survivors, and 9% of normal control group had 15 or more sexual partners. The difference between the normal control group and the two group of survivors was statistically significant (Tsai et al., 1979).

Desire dysfunction was also an aspect of sexual functioning which was affected by childhood sexual abuse (Becker et al., 1986; Westerlund, 1992). In Westerlund's study, 14% of the respondents reported that they had no sexual desire, while 53% reported guilt or shame in association with sexual desire (Westerlund, 1992). While the study conducted by Becker and associates (1986) did not offer separate analysis for the different types of sexual assault survivors (for example, rape survivors were not distinguished from survivors of childhood sexual abuse), 55% of the women with some sort of sexual assault reported desire dysfunction. In comparison, only 6% of the nonassaulted control group reported desire dysfunction (Becker et al., 1986).

Arousal dysfunction also appeared to affect a greater percentage of survivors of childhood sexual abuse than nonassaulted groups of women (Becker et al., 1986; Tsai et al., 1979). High percentages of survivors reported arousal dysfunction. More precisely, 56% to 84% of sexual assault survivors reported arousal dysfunction (Becker et al., 1986;.Westerlund, 1992) compared to 24% of a control group of nonassaulted women, who reported arousal dysfunction. Similarly, the study conducted by Tsai and associates (1979) found that the clinical group of survivors of childhood sexual abuse significantly differed from the nonclinical group of survivors and normal control group by demonstrating less responsiveness to their current partner (Tsai et al., 1979). Interestingly, Westerlund found that interference with sexual arousal occurred as a result of experiencing flashbacks by 63% of the respondents in her study (Westerlund, 1992).

Intromission problems, as reported by Westerlund (1992), were as follows: (a) vaginal pain on penetration reported by 23%, (b) vaginal pain which was not specific to penetration reported by 16%, (c) inadequate lubrication by 9% of the respondents, and (d) vaginal closure reported by 28% of the respondents. From Westerlund's study it was not possible to gain a perspective of how this compared to the general population, however, a study conducted by Becker and her associates (1986), found no significant differences between the assault and non assaulted groups of women.

Fear of sex was, of course, another outcome, which unlike intromission difficulties appeared to affect survivors of sexual abuse more than those with no history of assault (Becker et al., 1986). Between 37% and 54% of survivors reported fear of sex (Becker et al., 1986; Westerlund, 1992), whereas only 24% of women who never experienced assaults expressed a fear of sex (Becker et al., 1986).

In regards to other areas of sexual functioning, 16% of women who experienced childhood sexual abuse reported that they did not have sexual fantasies while one third reported that the offender was occasionally present in their fantasies (Westerlund, 1992). Over one half of these women indicated that they experienced confusion over their partner and offender during a flashback (Westerlund, 1992). There can be little dispute that experiencing fantasies of the abuser or confusion during a flashback would certainly detract from the enjoyment that the experience of sex should provide.

In regards to orgasmic problems, even though this was often reported as an area of sexual dysfunction for women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, research results are equivocal. One study did not find any significant difference between women who had been sexually assaulted and those who had not been assaulted (Becker et al., 1986), whereas, another study found that there was a significant difference between a clinical group and nonclinical group of survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Tsai et al., 1979). Unfortunately, studies of the general population which were done by Masters and Johnson on orgasmic difficulties failed to ask respondents for a history (Westerlund, 1992). Therefore, it was difficult to make any generalization in regards to the difference between survivors and the general population. What we do know is that 5% of survivors reported being unable to have orgasm under any circumstance (Westerlund, 1992). Most respondents reported that orgasm was associated with the development of trust in the relationship (Westerlund, 1992).

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse are also disproportionately represented among women who were former prostitutes (Bagley & Young, 1987). Nearly three quarters of ex-prostitutes had experienced childhood sexual abuse in comparisons to 28% of a control group which was drawn from a community survey. The type of assaults were more severe for former prostitutes than for the control group. In addition, the home environments of former prostitutes were more likely to be characterized by drinking and physical or emotional abuse. Overall, the home environments of former prostitutes were much more traumatic than were the home environments of control participants.

Apart from the literature which examines compulsive eating, little research focused on how survivors regard their bodies (Engel, 1989; Orbach, 1978). In one study of survivors who joined a self-help group, 30% of the respondents reported that they hated their bodies, 16% reported a sense of not owning their bodies, 42% reported that they dealt with feelings of powerlessness related to the body by exercise and athletic programs, 12% reported difficulties with their female identity, and 62% reported that they associated rape and abuse with being female (Westerlund, 1992). It was evident that survivors experienced a variety of negative perceptions about their bodies. Unfortunately, there was no way in which to compare these findings to the body perceptions of a control group.

A paucity of information likewise exists in regards to reproductive development and functioning. Westerlund's (1992) findings in regards to reproductive development and functioning demonstrated that survivors experienced a variety of difficulties. Sexual development was reported to be not welcomed by 56% of the incest survivors. Interestingly, 28% of the respondents who reported feeling as if their bodies had been taken over by another when they were pregnant and consequently this reminded them of the incest experience.

In the preceding discussion, I have relied on four studies to describe the types of sexual difficulties which were experienced by survivors. It is important to point out that the samples were drawn mainly from clinical and self-help groups. Only one of the studies used a non clinical group of survivors and a normal group from the population. Therefore it is important that the results be viewed in light of the populations upon which they described. Another very important limitation is the time difference among studies. Three of the studies took place in the latter part of the seventies which was essentially the dawning of the awareness of childhood sexual abuse. Westerlund's (1992) study occurred in 1985 when much more was known and many more services were available for incest survivors perhaps creating a difference in how women were coping with the sexual abuse. Yet, it was apparent that even in Westerlund's study, incest survivors did experience a variety of effects which extended into areas such as reproduction and perceptions of their bodies.

Psychological Functioning

A history of childhood sexual abuse also appears to impact on a variety of aspects of psychological functioning including cognitions, emotions and behaviors. In this section the impact of childhood sexual abuse on survivors' cognitions, and in particular self-blame, will be explored. Then emotional outcomes associated with survivors will be briefly reviewed. Finally, the impact of abuse on behavior will be examined. First, aspects of interpersonal functioning characteristic of survivors will be reviewed, and then the impact of abuse on addictive and compulsive behaviors will be briefly acknowledged.

Cognitive functioning. Self-blame, a cognition, is among the major symptoms reported in the clinical literature (Engel, 1989). Objectively it seems clear that a child is powerless and unable to give consent. How can a child be held accountable for an act to which they can not give consent?. Yet self-blame was experienced by most children who have been sexually assaulted (Ney, Moore, McPhee & Trought, 1986) and by some adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Russell, 1986). In the empirical literature, self-blame has been studied to determine the effect of self-blame on adjustment. Initially, such questions were limited to accident victims who became paralyzed, as victims who blamed themselves were coping better than those who did not blame themselves (Bulman & Wortman, 1977). However, as researchers and clinicians became aware that self-blame was common to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the question of the association of self-blame to adjustment was asked of survivors.

Researchers not only have sought to determine if self-blame was associated with poor adjustment, but they also have sought to find out if only a certain type of self-blame was associated with poor adjustment. Two types of blame have been theorized: characterological self-blame (which is blame directed towards the self, person or character of the person), and behavioral self-blame (which is directed towards the behavior of the person).

Some clinicians and experts in the area of child sexual abuse have suggested that at least some kinds of self-blame (in particular, behavioral self-blame) may serve a control-maintenance function for child victims of sexual abuse and that clinicians may be doing harm to their clients by working to shed children's cognitions of self-blame (Lamb, 1986; Shapiro, 1989). They argue that by blaming their own behavior for the sexual abuse, children may be able to gain a sense of personal control in a world which would otherwise be more threatening and frightening. Perceiving that one has a sense of control has been long been documented as being crucial to positive mental health (Seligman, 1975). While, this debate has focused on children, it does generalize to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse as research has sought to find if any positive benefits were associated to self-blame for adults.

All of the studies which have been conducted on adult survivors of sexual abuse have found no positive benefits associated with any type of self-blame. When research did investigate the association of self-blame to adjustment, it was found that self-blame was associated with depression (Hoagwood, 1990; Morrow, 1991), low self-esteem (Dyck, Koverola, Proulx, Quinonez & Chohan, 1991; Gold, 1986; Morrow, 1991), and psychological distress (Gold, 1986) among survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Not only was self-blame associated with poorer adjustment, but self-blame was found to predict the occurrence of negative effects from sexual abuse (Wyatt & Newcomb,1990).

Interestingly, when adult survivors remembered their experience of self-blame as children they were not able to distinguish between the different types of blame (Hoagwood, 1990). Hoagwood's (1990) study suggested that survivors do not distinguish between their behavior and their character as children. This suggests that self-blame appears to be experienced in a rudimentary manner by children, who, are cognitively incapable of distinguishing the nuances of blame.

In addition, research has found that women survivors of childhood sexual abuse also generalize self-blame to their present life situations when bad events occur (Gold, 1986). However, for positive events survivors did not accept personal credit for the event, but rather blamed the good event on factors outside of themselves (Gold, 1986). In other words, women who were sexually abused found that it was much easier to accept personal responsibility for bad events than for good events than did a control group of nonabused women.

The results of these studies consistently failed to find any positive effect of self-blame on adjustment. Unfortunately, self-blame was measured in a simplistic way consistent with an attribution theory perspective. This was accomplished by attributing an event's causation to self, the environmental/situation or chance (Heider, 1958). Heider's work formed the basis for attribution theory for the most part, and, this has been the theoretical framework guiding studies examining the relationships between self-blame and adjustment of survivors. Unfortunately none of the past studies on self-blame sought to elicit responses from survivors without leading or imposing categories of self-blame through simplistic paper and pencil attributional measures. This seriously limits the ways in which self-blame has been described. In reality, women may perceive self-blame quite differently from that which has been documented. Women have not had the chance to voice for themselves causal explanations or attributions for the sexual abuse.

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse not only struggle with self-blame, but closely associated with self-blame are the self-denigratory beliefs which may ravage a survivors' sense of self. Such beliefs have been documented in both community (Russell, 1986) and clinical samples (Herman, 1981; Jehu, Gazan & Klassen, 1988) and include a sense of being bad, unworthy, damaged, stigmatized, and inferior to others. Specifically, 78% of Jehu's clinical sample (Jehu et al., 1988) endorsed the belief that they were worthless and 20% of Russell's community sample of women survivors reported such beliefs (Russell, 1986).

Low self-esteem, a likely outcome of self-denigratory beliefs, also affects the lives of women who experienced childhood sexual abuse and is reported by various researchers in clinical samples of survivors (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Herman, 1981; Jehu et al., 1988). Conversely, one study of employed female nurses did not find significant differences in the self-esteem of those who were sexually abused versus those who were not sexually abused in childhood (Greenwald, Leitenberg, Cado & Tarran, 1990). Yet, from my own experience as a professionally employed nurse and a survivor of childhood sexual abuse I can testify that the ravages of low self-esteem plagued me through out my life. No doubt, it is best not to generalize the effects of low self-esteem to all women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

Trust is another issue which affects the lives of survivors. Researchers report that survivors may have difficulties trusting others (Jehu et al., 1988; Herman, 1981; Russell, 1986). Interestingly, clinicians report that survivors may adopt one of two extremes positions of either trusting individuals completely or not trusting anyone at all (Bass & Davis, 1988; Malmo & Laidlaw, 1993). This outcome is due to the strategies of repression or dissociation which allowed survivors to cope with their feelings (Bass & Davis, 1988; Malmo & Laidlaw, 1993). Resolution involves attention to internal cues and feelings which provide messages of the trustworthiness of people (Malmo & Laidlaw, 1993).

Emotional functioning. Emotional symptoms experienced by survivors of childhood sexual abuse include depression, anxiety, anger, fear, and guilt/shame. Depression is by far the most widely cited and measured symptom among survivors (Briere & Runtz, 1993).[3] Both clinical and community samples of survivors reported feeling depressed at various times and in variable degrees of severity (Greenwald et al., 1990; Herman, 1981, Jehu, 1989; Russell, 1986). Similarly, anxiety is commonly reported among survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Briere & Runtz, 1993; Greenwald et al., 1990; Russell, 1986). Notably, significantly higher levels of anxiety were found among nonclinical professionally employed survivors than employed women who were not sexually abused during childhood (Elliott & Briere, 1992). Anger has also reported as a problematic emotional reaction (Edwards & Donaldson, 1989; Engel, 1989), primarily because gender role stereotypes dictate the suppression of anger in women (Malmo & Ladilaw, 1993). Fear is also an emotional reaction which may be experienced in a generalized manner by women who were sexually abused (Edwards & Donaldson, 1989; Russell, 1986) or may be felt only in relation to men (Jehu et al., 1985). Finally, guilt and shame are among the emotions which are commonly associated with the actual sexual abuse (Edwards & Donaldson, 1989; Herman, 1981). Both Jehu and his associates (1985) and the Women's Research Center (1989) reported that guilt was experienced by women when they blamed themselves for the sexual abuse.

Behavioral functioning. Not only does a history of sexual abuse affect cognitive and emotional functioning, but it clearly affects interpersonal functioning as well. Without any doubt, clinicians would testify that childhood sexual abuse affects survivors' ability to interact with others (Blume, 1990; Meiselman, 1990). Research offers support to this position (Daie, Witztum & Eleff,

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[3] It is recognized that depression has cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. However, since depression is commonly associated along with other emotional reations in the literature, it has been included under emotional functioning in this review.

1989; Finkelhor et al., 1989; Schiller, 1988). What aspects of interpersonal functioning are affected through the experience of having been sexually abused?

Problems in relationships begin in childhood, as female survivors of childhood sexual abuse have fewer friends, experience more physical punishment from their parents and do not experience the same degree of emotional intimacy with their parents as compared to women who have never experienced sexual abuse (Gold, 1986). As survivors of childhood sexual abuse progress to adulthood, the ability to maintain intimate relationships can be problematic. For example, 70% of survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse subjectively acknowledged that the sexual abuse had affected their ability to form intimate relationships (Schiller, 1988). In another study of survivors of sibling incest, all four individuals who were studied demonstrated difficulty in maintaining a close relationship (Daie, Witztum & Eleff, 1989).

A more objective indicator of an adult's ability to maintain intimate relationships would be marital stability. Individuals who experienced abuse in the form of attempted or actual intercourse as children reported more marital disruption as adults than did adults who had no history of childhood sexual abuse (Finkelhor et al., 1989).

Regardless of the indicator, it was obvious that survivors experienced difficulty in maintaining intimate relationships. These findings are not surprising, given that women survivors have been reported to experience a lack of interpersonal boundaries, isolation and secrecy. Clinicians are aware of the difficulties that survivors have in defining themselves and setting limits with others, that is, in defining interpersonal boundaries (Blume, 1990; Bass & Davis, 1988). Such a difficulties originate from the disregard perpetrators have for survivors' feelings or needs. This disregard acts to destroy the self and boundaries which would have voiced protestation to abuse (Blume, 1990). I certainly can testify that my boundaries were destroyed through the sexual abuse I experienced as a child. For example, I found that without boundaries, I was not able to respond to interpersonal disrespect in ways which would have protected myself. Learning how to do this required conscious effort, the reconstruction of my previous childhood patterns, and the ending of unhealthy relationships.

Like interpersonal boundaries, isolation affects survivors' interpersonal relationships. The behavior pattern of isolation has been reported in clinical samples of women who experienced childhood sexual abuse (Herman, 1981; Jehu, Gazan & Klassen, 1985) and in a community sample of women (Women's Research Center, 1989). In fact, 81% of Jehu and his associates' clinical sample of survivors reported that they isolated themselves (Jehu et al., 1985). How do survivors' patterns of isolation compare to women who have not experienced childhood sexual abuse? From the work of Briere and Runtz (1989) it is known that there was no significant difference between clinical groups of survivors and nonsurvivors with respect to isolation. The prevalence of isolation among nonclinical samples of abused and nonabused women is not known. Aside from the issues of prevalence, there is no doubt in my mind that the pattern of isolation seriously hampers the possibility of procuring intimacy. Yet, patterns such as isolation, hiding, or being invisible act to protect survivors from others (Women's Research Center, 1989).

Secrecy is another behavior which affects patterns of interpersonal relationships (Women's Research Center, 1989). From a community study of survivors, it was found that survivors feared accidental disclosure of their secret and as a consequence utilized isolation as a way of protecting their secret (Women's Research Center, 1989). Notably, most survivors recalled that they were coerced by their abusers to keep the secret (Herman, 1981; Women's Research Center, 1989).

There can be no doubt that the behavioral patterns of isolation and secrecy act to create difficulties in maintaining relationships. However, further insight into this difficulty is derived from an interesting study of eight female survivors of intrafamilial sexual abuse. Van Buskirk and Cole (1983) reported that women's partners were similar to their fathers; that is, the lovers/spouses were described as cold, self-centered, dominant and exploitive. In contrast, the women reported that they were eager to please and cooperate in the relationship. Furthermore, over half of the women were not assertive. It seems that patterns established early in childhood may act to influence women's choices of mates. It is easy to understand how difficult it would be for women to maintain intimate relationships with mates that are self-centered and dominant . So it might be more accurate to state that for survivors of sexual abuse, some of the difficulties in intimate relationships are due to the patterning of women's previous relationships in childhood.

Addictions to alcohol and drugs further describe the type of behavior patterns which may become apparent within the context of interpersonal relationships. Addictions to alcohol and drugs are experienced by survivors (Briere & Runtz, 1993; Herman, 1981; Jehu, 1989; Women's Resource Center, 1989). The prevalence of drug abuse and alcoholism was respectively 35% and 37% in a clinical sample of survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Jehu, 1989). There is no doubt that addictions cause turmoil in relationships, yet they may be understood as coping strategies which are used to dull the painful memories of childhood sexual abuse (Malmo & Laidlaw, 1993).

Like addictions, self-mutilation, is understood as a coping strategy (Malmo & Laidlaw, 1993). Self-mutilation has generally been accepted as those behaviors which cause damage to the body through repetitious cutting, burning or hitting. Although there is no evidence to support the following rationale, it is generally accepted that self-mutilation acts to temporarily reduce psychic tension (Briere & Runtz, 1993). The prevalence of self-mutilation is hard to determine as measures of self-mutilation often include suicide as indicators (Briere & Runtz, 1993).

Psychiatric Conditions

Volumes of research have been devoted to describing the presence of psychiatric conditions among groups of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The psychiatric conditions which have been researched and described are perhaps an attempt to understand the harm which has been inflicted upon survivors. However, the labels which have been used by the medical profession to describe the conditions carry very negative connotations.

The usefulness of naming conditions and labelling people are that a constellation of symptoms can be described and treatment (often drugs) can thus be employed. However, to the extent that individuals with various conditions are objectified and viewed only in terms of the conditions, without any compassion and hope of resolution, then labelling becomes harmful.

Borderline personality is a condition which is characterized by unstable relationship patterns, exploitativeness in relationships, impulsivity, affective instability, inappropriate anger and recurrent suicidal or self-mutilation (Frances, 1987). This condition is considered highly problematic to treat (Waldinger & Gunderson, 1987). Historically, the label "borderline" was used to label people (women, usually) who did not get better and who psychiatrists found troublesome or hopeless. Only very recently were these women understood to be survivors of abuse. Most psychiatrists still treat them inappropriately, that is, with drugs only (C. Malmo, personal communication, April 12,1994).

Two types of retrospective studies have been used to investigate the occurrence of borderline personality among survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In the first type, clinical populations of adults diagnosed with borderline personality have been studied to find out how many have histories of childhood sexual abuse (Ogata, Silk, Goodrich, Lohr, Westen & Hill, 1990; Shearer, Peters, Quaytman & Ogden, 1990). In these studies, between 71 to 75% of the adults diagnosed with borderline personality reported childhood sexual abuse (Ogata et al., 1990; Shearer et al., 1990). In the second type, adults with known histories of childhood sexual abuse have been investigated to see what proportion have borderline personality (Goodwin, Cheeves & Connell, 1990). In the second type of study, where survivors of childhood sexual abuse were investigated, 19 out of 20 survivors were diagnosed as having borderline personality (Goodwin et al., 1990). Both types of studies have confirmed that large percentages of clinical populations of survivors of childhood sexual abuse have borderline personality (Goodwin et al., 1990; Ogata et al., 1990; Shearer et al.,1990).

How do these studies compare to other clinical populations? Only one comparison group has been used and this was a group of depressed inpatients. Twenty-two percent of a depressed comparison group had a history of childhood sexual abuse compared to 71% of the group of borderline inpatients (Ogata et al., 1990). What appeared to distinguish the group of survivors with borderline personality, was the presence of multiple types of abuse or multiple perpetrators. For example, 65% of the borderline inpatients suffered either multiple types of abuses or multiple perpetrators when they were sexually abused (Ogata et al., 1990). And among the group of survivors, 19 out of the 20 women had multiple perpetrators and all of the 20 women also experienced violence either through physical abuse or by witnessing it (Goodwin et al., 1990). In keeping with the dramatic nature of the borderline personality, it was obvious that a majority of the individuals described in the studies had experienced traumatic abuse.

Posttraumatic stress has also been identified as a consequence of being sexually abused in childhood. However, it appears that posttraumatic stress is associated with intrafamilial sexual abuse (Albach & Everaerd, 1992; Lindberg & Distad, 1985). The two studies which found high percentages (65% to 100%) of survivors with posttraumatic stress only included survivors who had experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse (Albach & Everaerd, 1992; Lindberg & Distad, 1985).

Greenwald and Leitenberg (1990) who studied nurses from two hospitals, found that the rates for posttraumatic stress were considerably lower. Only 2% of the respondents who had experienced childhood sexual abuse of any type were currently experiencing posttraumatic stress, whereas 17% had experienced posttraumatic stress in the past. Further they determined that posttraumatic stress was more likely to be an outcome if respondents experienced father-daughter incest and if sexual intercourse was completed or attempted. When a nonclinical population was surveyed, it was demonstrated that posttraumatic stress was associated with the severity of sexual abuse.

Eating disorders are also associated with childhood sexual abuse. In an effort to explore if there was a link between eating disorders and childhood sexual abuse, Steiger and Zanko (1990) studied 73 women who were diagnosed with eating disorders. Women were diagnosed as anorexic restricters, anorexic bingers, bulimic with an anorexic history, and bulimic with no anorexic history. Two comparison groups, a psychiatric comparison group and a normal group, similar in age to the women with eating disorders were included in the study. The psychiatric group included women who were not heavily medicated or psychotic and the normal group included women without eating disorders or psychiatric disorders. Sexual abuse of any type was detected in 33% of the psychiatric group, 9% of the normal group, 46% of the women diagnosed as bulimic with no anorexic history, 25% of the women diagnosed as bulimic with anorexic history, 42% of the women diagnosed as anorexic bingers, and 6% of the women diagnosed as anorexic restricters. A measure of a defense styles was also administered to the women. Incest survivors with eating disorders and without eating disorders were found to have a self-sacrificing style or a tendency to sacrifice their own needs in order to resolve conflict or to obtain approval, whereas women who did not have a history of childhood sexual abuse did not have a self-sacrificing style. A self-sacrificing style did not differentiate women on the basis of their eating disorders, but rather differentiated women on the basis of their histories of intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse. The authors concluded that sexual abuse may predispose a person to develop a certain style of coping or to develop a certain type of character which then leads to the development of an eating disorder (Steiger & Zanko,1990).

In addition, to the forementioned psychiatric conditions of borderline personality, posttraumatic stress, and eating disorders, clinical disorders such as major depression, agoraphobia, obessive-compulsive disorder, social phobia, substance addictions, and multiple personalities have been associated with a history of childhood sexual abuse (Hunter, 1991; 1990; Meiselman, 1990; Parker & Parker, 1991; Saunders, Villeponteaux, Lipovsky, Kilpatrick & Veronen, 1992). The list of psychiatric conditions is simply overwhelming. From my own experience in working with the medical model, there can be no doubt that such an orientation easily lends itself to a preoccupation with clinical disorders as opposed to the people who are diagnosed.

Many of the studies which were described in the section "What is Known About the Adjustment of Survivors" have a static view of adjustment and do not attempt to capture the dynamic nature of psychological adjustment. This is a bias and of course paints a dim picture for survivors, which could be translated into a sense of despair in relation to the chances of recovery. While documentation of the effects has helped empiricists and clinicians to understand how traumatic childhood sexual abuse is for survivors, the usefulness for documentation of the effects is limited. The propensity to label and categorize is consistent with the medical model, but harmful to survivors as often they feel like they are bad or permanently damaged (Jehu et al., 1985).

Two methodological limitations characterize the studies which were reviewed. First, studies used clinical populations of survivors more often than community samples of women. An second, many of the studies simply failed to separate the different types of sexual abuse in the data analysis.

In summary, what is known about the impact of childhood sexual abuse is largely negative and focuses on problems in the areas of physical and psychological functioning. While the list of clinical disorders and symptoms is overwhelming, it is important to remember that all survivors are not affected with serious psychopathology. As will be demonstrated in the following section, the impact of childhood sexual abuse is variable and depends on many factors.

D. What is Known About the Factors Which Affect Adjustment

The complexity of adjustment is nowhere more evident than in the literature which seeks to determine which factors are associated with positive or negative outcomes. As will be described in the following paragraphs, research findings are often equivocal. The reason for this is no doubt due to methodological shortcomings of studies, but another reason for this is due to the fact that adjustment is a dynamic process involving the whole being of a person. Individual disciplines often fail to capture the whole as each discipline is orientated to a segment of the person. Despite the fact that more recent studies are attempting to become holistic, the dynamic nature of the process has not been adequately addressed. Presented below is a review of the factors which have been identified to affect the adjustment outcomes of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The factors which are discussed below are: (a) the age at which molestation last occurred, (b) the duration of the abuse, (c) the frequency of the abuse, (d) the type of sexual abuse, (e) the presence of coercion, (f) disclosure, (g) relationship to the perpetrator, (h) family variables, and (i) the quality of therapy.

The Age at Which Molestation Occurred

Equivocal results are characteristic of the research results in regards to the factor of the age at which molestation occurred. Some studies have found that younger children are more likely to be adversely affected by sexual abuse as opposed to older children (Courtois, 1979; Long & Jackson, 1993; Nash, Ziney & Hulsey, 1993). By contrast, other research has found that an older age was associated with poorer outcomes (Murphy et al., 1988; Tsai et al.,1979; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). Other reviews of the literature also revealed equivocal findings in relation to the factor of the age at which molestation first occurred (Finkelhor & Browne,1988; Hanson, 1990).

What might account for the equivocal nature of these results? As Finkelhor and Browne (1988) note that equivocal findings are likely a result of the studies not "parcel(ing) out the effects of other aspects of the experience, such as intercourse, which tend to covary with age" (p. 276). From my own review, I noted that very different populations were used in the analyses. For example, the studies which find that an older age was associated with poorer adjustment outcomes, used community samples and random sampling (Murphy et al., 1988; Wyatt and Newcomb,1990). By contrast, a purposive sampling of clinical and volunteer groups were used in the studies which found that poorer adjustment was related to a younger age (Courtois, 1979; Long & Jackson, 1993; Nash et al., 1993).

The Duration of Abuse

The severity of consequences of abuse have been been linked with the length of time over which the abuse occurred. Most research has found that a long duration of sexual abuse is associated with poorer adjustment outcomes (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Russell, 1986; Tsai et al., 1979). Only one study was reviewed that found that a short duration of abuse was associated with negative effects (Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). In his review of the literature, Hanson (1990), found that the majority of the studies support the relationship between a long duration of abuse and poor adjustment outcomes.

While, most of the research conducted on adults found a relationship between the duration of abuse and severity of consequences, studies of children (Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Nash et al., 1993) and adolescents (Johnson and Kenkel,1991) failed to find the presence of any relationship. Since adolescent and child samples were characterized by groups of children and adolescents in which the abused had stopped, the lack of an association might be accounted for by the shorter period of time over which the abuse lasts, thus not allowing enough variation to detect the relationship. Or it may be that a ceiling effect occurred in childhood and adolescence; that is, all abuse, no matter what the length, was equally traumatic. It is conceivable that the devastating effects of long term abuse show up in adulthood as opposed to earlier developmental periods as adults are supposed to be prepared to take on increasingly more responsibility in the areas of work and family.

The Frequency of Abuse

Intuitively, it makes sense to think that high frequency of sexual abuse would be associated with poor adjustment outcomes. In other words, survivors who experienced multiple incidents of sexual abuse would be expected to have more problems in relation to adjustment than do survivors who experienced single incidents of abuse. Not only does this make intuitive sense, but research results have certainly supported this position (Hanson, 1990; Nash et al., 1993; Tsai et al., 1979; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). However, some studies support the opposite position; that is, they found no difference in the adjustment of women who experienced multiple incidents compared with those who experienced single incidents of abuse (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Courtois, 1979; Russell, 1986). What could account for the difference between the studies which found a relationship versus those that did not find a relationship between the frequency of sexual abuse and the adjustment of women? Most notably, studies which found no relationship (Courtois, 1979; Russell, 1986), have not used standardized adjustment measures, but instead used subjective indicators to measure adjustment. The use of subjective measures of adjustment may minimize the negative effects which are reported in the research as the women who report their own adjustment have minimized the negative effects they experienced. As presented above, the studies which are stronger in terms of methodology do indicate the presence of a relationship between a high frequency of abuse and poor adjustment outcomes.

The Type of Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse ranges along a continuum from exposure to kissing or fondling to various types of intercourse. The majority of researchers agree that survivors who have experienced sexual intercourse, which sometimes refers to vaginal intercourse and at other times is not specified, have poorer adjustment outcomes than do survivors who experienced other types of sexual abuse (Finkelhor et al., 1989; Harter, Alexander & Neimeyer, 1988; Russell, 1986; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). There are only a few studies which have failed to find a relationship between the type of sexual abuse and adversity of adjustment outcomes (Feinauer, 1989; Parker & Parker, 1991; Tsai et al., 1979). With the exception of a few studies, the relationship between poor adjustment and sexual intercourse was found.

The Presence of Coercion

Coercion has been identified as factor which varied in abusive situations and may be both physical and psychological. Physical coercion refers to the use of physical force, restraint or physical violence, whereas psychological coercion refers to the use of threats, disguises, rewards, or favors in return for compliance. Most studies found that the presence of physical force was related to poorer adjustment outcomes (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Harter et al., 1988; Johnson & Kenkel, 1991; Long & Johnson, 1993; Russell, 1986), while only a few studies failed to detect such a relationship (Courtois, 1979; Gold, 1986). Similarly, other reviews of the literature found support for the presence of the relationship between physical coercion and poor adjustment outcomes (Hanson,1990; Finkelhor & Browne,1988).

Few studies have investigated the variable of psychological coercion as it relates to adjustment. One study found that when psychological coercion was present adult survivors were more likely to make self-blame statements which were in turn related to negative effects of abuse (Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). Another study which investigated psychological coercion in children, found that children who received rewards for the sexual abuse were assessed by social workers as functioning at poorer levels (Conte & Schuerman, 1987). Despite the limited number of studies, both of the studies which investigated the variable of psychological coercion found poorer adjustment outcomes among women and children who received rewards, favors or threats for the sexual abuse.

From the studies which were reviewed, coercion of any kind was linked to poorer adjustment outcomes. There was no way to assess which type of coercive experience was more traumatic as studies have not compared these experiences.

Disclosure of Sexual Abuse

Disclosure of sexual abuse is an area of research which has received little investigation. From the studies which have examined disclosure, several patterns are evident. A study of a clinical group of survivors of father-daughter incest described the circumstances under which survivors were more likely to disclose (Herman, 1981). Herman found that 58% of the sample never did tell anyone of the abuse until after they left home . For the women who did disclose the abuse, (the number or percentage who disclosed to their mothers was not reported), most of the mothers were unwilling or unable to do anything about the disclosure (Herman, 1981). Similar findings have been found in more recent studies. Relatedness to the perpetrator was associated with secrecy (Faller ,1989; Wyatt & Newcomb,1990). When survivors disclosed shortly after the last incident of abuse, the abusers were more likely to have been non-custodial fathers than biological fathers who were living with the survivors (Faller, 1989).

The type of reaction which survivors received upon disclosure was also related to adjustment outcomes (Everson, Hunter, Runyon, Edelsohn & Coulter, 1989; Johnson & Kenkel,1991). Survivors of incest who received a nonsupportive reaction from their mothers at the time of disclosure were found to be more distressed than those survivors who received a supportive reaction (Everson et al., 1989; Johnson & Kenkel, 1991). Interestingly, Everson and associates (1989) found that mothers were more likely to provide support to their daughters if perpetrators admitted to committing the sexual abuse or if perpetrators were estranged from the relationship.

Studies addressing the question of whether or not disclosure was associated with poor adjustment produced equivocal findings. Not disclosing abuse was found to be related to negative outcomes by one recent study (Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). Conversely, Browne and Finkelhor (1988) reported that two out of the three studies they reviewed found no relationship between disclosure and adversity of outcomes. What most likely accounts for the mixed findings between disclosure and adjustment is that this relationship is mediated by other variables such the reaction of others to the disclosure.

Relationship to the Perpetrator

Studies which have investigated the relationship of the perpetrator to the survivor have also revealed mixed results. Some studies have found that poorer adjustment is associated with paternal relatedness to the survivor (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986, Harter et al., 1988; Russell, 1986). Other studies, more generally, found that relatedness to other family members, such as brothers, were associated with poorer adjustment outcomes (Long & Jackson, 1993; Wyatt & Newcomb, 1990). By contrast, other studies failed to find any relationship between adjustment outcomes and relatedness (Courtois, 1979; Gold, 1986; Nash et al., 1993; Parker & Parker, 1991; Tsai et al., 1979). This is consistent with Hanson's (1990) review which reported mixed results from the studies reviewed: there was a significant relationship between relatedness and adjustment for about half of the studies, while for the other half no relationship was detected. Despite the mixed results, none of the studies have found that poorer adjustment was associated with perpetrators who were nonfamily members. Overall, when perpetrators were relatives as opposed to nonrelatives, survivors experienced poorer adjustment outcomes. What may be important is the degree of felt closeness as opposed to the lineage pattern. In fact, this conclusion was supported by one study which found that greater distress was evident when perpetrators were known and trusted by survivors (Feinauer, 1989).

Family Variables

Clinicians working with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse generally accept the family as being important to the adjustment of survivors (Engel, 1989). Often the work of recovery involves facing the truth of the abuse and what this means in terms of family relationships. Survivors may have to decide if they will risk confrontation, if they have not already done this. In addition, there are the decisions that survivors usually have to face in regards to how relationships with family members will be constructed. The way in which relationships are reconstructed depends upon the survivor and their wishes (Engel, 1989).

Having reconstructed my family, I can personally testify that it is a painful process, as the admission that my family was not all that it should have been left me feeling robbed. Even after I accepted the personal loss, there was the constant reminder from the rest of society of the heavy loss I sustained. It was akin to going to war and having won the battle, but losing the war. The reason for feeling this way is that the family as an institution has the connotation of goodness, yet it is the site of such personal loss. And this is a tragedy that is untold. It is living with the truth, while the untruth that remains creates the suffering.

While the personal experience of loss can be overwhelming within the context of a family where intrafamilial sexual abuse occurs, research does not usually reflect the personal experience of being raised in families or even attempt to describe what happens to the relationships within the family of origin after survivors leave home. Research, however, has orientated itself to the family as an unit of research in an attempt to describe the patterns of relationships within the families of survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

So what has been described in the families of survivors of childhood sexual abuse? Weaker emotional bonding (or as termed by family theorists less cohesion) has been detected in the families of origin for survivors of childhood sexual abuse than in the families of origin of comparison groups (Harter et al., 1988; Jackson, Calhoun, Amick, Maddever & Habif, 1990; Long & Jackson, 1991). In addition to weaker emotional bonds, the survivors' family of origin have been described as demonstrating less trust, less empathy, less respect for others and significantly less clarity in expression than a comparison group (Carson, Gertz, Donaldson & Wonderlich, 1992). Without high levels of trust, respect and empathy for each other, it is not hard to understand why the families of survivors would be less emotionally intimate than other families.

What type of impact does a decreased level of cohesion (or emotional bonding) have on the survivor? The presence of childhood sexual abuse which included intercourse and a decreased level of cohesion in the survivor's family of origin were found to be predictive of social isolation (Harter et al., 1988). It is of significance to note that in their families of procreation, survivors of childhood sexual abuse had significantly lower levels of cohesion than a comparison group. Emotional bonding problems do appear to have continuity across generations.

A pattern of paternal domination has also been described. More specifically, survivors' families of origin reported greater levels of paternal domination than did comparison groups (Edwards & Alexander, 1992; Jackson et al., 1990). This is certainly consistent with Judith Herman's (1981) study of adult survivors of father-daughter incest in which a pattern of paternal domination was described. Not only was paternal domination present, but half of the survivors reported that their fathers had been violent (Herman, 1981).

The cost of paternal domination is high. Its presence predicted survivors' dissatisfaction with male relationships in adulthood (Edwards & Alexander, 1992). In addition to the predicted statistical outcome, the personal heart felt cost to women being raised in environments where they were treated with little or no respect is immeasurable.

The family variable of adaptability has also been found to be significantly lower in the families of survivors than in comparison groups. Adaptability refers to the family's ability to change and adapt itself in response to stress and can be observed in how a family carried out it leadership, rules, roles and discipline. Decreased levels of family adaptability were directly related to social maladjustment in survivors (Harter et al., 1989).

Overall research has found several differences between the families of origin for survivors of childhood sexual abuse and comparison groups. The areas which were found to be different were lower levels of emotional bonding, lower levels of adaptability and higher levels of paternal domination. Lower levels of emotional bonding and adaptability and higher levels of paternal domination were in turn related to higher levels of social maladjustment.

Quality of Therapy

No where does the quality of therapy appear as critical as it does when the subject of therapist-client sexual exploitation is considered. The proportion of professionals who have engaged in sex with their clients was estimated to be at least one tenth of psychiatrists, psychologists and physicians (Derosis, Hamilton, Morrison, Strauss, 1987; Gartell, Herman, Olarte, Feldstein, Localio, 1986; Kardener, Fuller & Mensh, 1973; Pope & Bouhoutsos, 1986). Survivors of childhood sexual abuse appear to be more vulnerable to therapist-client sexual exploitation than other clients who seek therapy as 23% of a sample of adult survivors reported that were sexually exploited by helping professionals (Armsworth, 1989). The effect of this experience was described by the survivors as being negative. A further 23% reported that they were victimized through therapy by not being believed, when their reports were dismissed and when they were blamed (Armsworth, 1989).

In an attempt to understand what makes adult survivors more vulnerable to therapist-client sexual exploitation, Armsworth conducted a qualitative study and discovered three factors which fostered the development of a sexually exploitative relationship between adult survivors and therapists. She found that: (a) when survivors were infants and children they did not develop a sense of being a person, (b) the sense of not being a person was reinforced through their adult experiences which often included revictimization experiences, and (c) survivors reacted with helplessness to therapists sexual advances (Armsworth, 1990).

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse are obviously victimized throughout their childhood and adulthood, having developed patterns which allowed them to survive victimization. These patterns can be limiting and self-defeating, however, they need to be changed so that survivors can react to experiences of victimization from a place other than powerlessness. Unethical and untrustworthy therapists reinforce the patterns of victim behavior through the sexual revictimization of clients. Therapist-client sexual exploitation is clearly a crime as adult survivors are a population which are clearly vulnerable and need to learn new patterns which will allow them to react appropriately.

While therapist-client sexual exploitation represents the extreme in therapy which exploits and damages survivors who are seeking to gain control of their lives, therapy which is traditional in its focus has also been described as damaging by adult women who have experienced sexual assaults (Hutchinson & McDaniel, 1986). Adult women reported that traditional therapy often blamed the victim, defined the situation for the victim, denied the victim's pain, disallowed women to make sexual assault the primary focus in the therapy, interpreted events for victims, disallowed the victim their anger and labelled the victims (Hutchinson & McDaniel, 1986). This was not the case for therapy which had a feminist orientation. Such an approach promotes equality in the therapeutic relationship, encourages the client to take control of therapy sessions, promotes an analysis of gender roles in sexual victimization, encourages women to freely discuss the offender, encourages women to express their feelings in regards to the assaults, insists the issue of responsibility for the assault rest with the offender, and addresses self-blame with the intention of removing it.

Clearly, the issue of finding therapists who will not reinforce the false sense of self-blame is important to adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Yet finding a therapist who is skilled and aware of the gender role power inequalities inherent in sexual assault is indeed a challenging task. The challenge is reflected as adult survivors seek out a therapist they feel comfortable with. It is not unusual for the adult survivor to visit four or more different therapists in their attempts to find therapists who are helpful (Hutchinson & McDaniel, 1986). While, some survivors did find adequate therapy after continuing their search, for many adult survivors of sexual abuse the search for a satisfactory therapist was abandoned even after their first unsatisfactory experience with therapy. Frenken and van Stolk (1990) comment on the help seeking behavior as follows:

> A remarkable system showed itself in the experiences of the whole group of victims who had sought help as they went from one professional to another. At each subsequent consultation, more than half of the women went on to a new professional, either because they were referred to them or because they continued their quest on their own initiative (p. 259).

It is evident that seeking therapy is a critical point for the adult survivor of sexual abuse. Helping professionals need to become cognizant of the issues which are of prime importance to the survivor; particularly those which will lead them to develop the interpersonal competency which allows survivors to control their lives. Clearly, the extreme form of inept treatment is therapist-client sexual exploitation, while other forms of inept treatment such as blaming continue to victimize the survivor and do not allow the survivor to gain mastery or a sense of control.

While the quality of therapy appeared to be critical to gaining a sense of control, it was evident that there are many factors which are associated with the degree of adjustment survivors experienced. The many factors which were described help to describe how adjustment varies between different groups of survivors.

E. Completing the Picture

From the preceding discussion on "What is Known About Factors Which Affect Adjustment", it is evident that many factors are related to adjustment. For example, the use of physical coercion during the sexual assault, sexual assaults which progressed to intercourse, being assaulted by someone who was biologically or emotionally close and who resided in the same dwelling, not having a supportive reaction when the sexual assault was disclosed, and being raised in a family where the father was dominant and when the felt closeness was lacking between family members clearly were related to maladjustment for survivors.

Results of the studies examining the relationships between age at which molestation occurred, duration of the abuse, and frequency of the abuse and adjustment for survivors were equivocal. While these factors were important to adjustment, the relationship to adjustment was not straightforward. Part of the problem in detecting the relationship to adjustment was that different trajectories were evident for different population samples such as adults and children. For example, the children and adolescents who are studied have probably experienced an end to the abuse at an earlier age than the adults who are studied. It is difficult to compare studies which use adult samples as opposed to children or adolescents for the variables of duration, frequency, and age of being abused may be vastly different and may describe different experiences of abuse. Further, children and adolescents in research studies have been believed and validated by either a caregiver or some other adult.

No matter what factors were assessed as affecting adjustment, it is evident that the events of the abuse, do affect the way survivors live their lives. The effects of abuse permeate in varying degrees the physical and psychological realms of women. While the effects of sexual abuse affect the lives of women, it is important to stress that the presence of these effects in no way implies that these women are in any way inferior to other individuals.

One of the dangers of interpreting the symptoms and effects of sexual abuse from a medical model is that such an emphasis concentrates on biological and individualistic conceptualizations of disease, largely dismissing the social, psychological, moral and spiritual domains of abuse. As I recall my own journey, I am very aware of how I felt when I experienced the symptoms without connecting them to the abuse. At this time I was seeing a psychologist whose terms of reference were straight from the American Psychiatric Association's (1987) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder. My experience of the therapy reinforced my own sense of being damaged as the therapy centered on what psychological disorders I had. In fact, most of my therapy at that time consisted of analyzing the test results from a psychological instrument and treating the symptoms.

What is notable is that the medical model's claim to objectivity, which is from the scientific approach (Guba, 1990), in effect hides its biases. From my own experience, I can say that I did experience objectivity as being very impersonal, cold and biased. The expert assumed to know everything and I was there to learn what I could. From this experience I began to think that if I could just remember to interpret everything from the context of the psychological test results I would have insight and control. I just needed to remember that I had these constellation of symptoms.

Yet, this does not complete the picture for me. What was missing from my own journey was the embracement of my own experience of sexual abuse. It is the embracement of the experience of the survivor that is essentially being missed. Apart from personal accounts of survivors such as Fraser's (1987) book My Father's House, few studies have allowed survivors to describe their experiences. The exception to this was Hutchinson and McDaniel's (1986) article entitled "The social reconstruction of sexual assault by women victims: A comparison of therapeutic experiences" and three studies which described the lived experience of survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Lepine, 1985; Kondora, 1993; Women's Research Center, 1989).

Kondora (1993) found that the lived experience of incest involved remembering and caring. The process of remembering was a central focus of women's stories, often it was painful but remembering also offered meaning for the present and hope for the future as the past was finally experienced. Kondora (1993) states "Remembering gives meaning to their daily lives through connection that the women make between their pasts and their presents" (p. 14). Kondora (1993) goes on to further state that "It was only after recovering those memories that they were able to create meaning regarding their feelings and feel as if the [missing piece] had been discovered" (p. 14).

Caring as an emergent theme was discussed by women in terms of the lack thereof in their childhood and of the meaning this had for them. Kondora (1993) stated:

> As children, the women described feeling different from those around them. This differentness was apparent to them as they compared their reality to that of those around them and were left feeling as if they had missed out on something. The presence of incest in their lives constricted many childhood possibilities, (p. 14).

The Women's Research Center (1989) also described the lived experience of seventeen adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse and eight mothers of sexually abused children. The majority of the survivors experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse. A family atmosphere of power inequities, parental deprivation, emotional and physical abuse, rigidly defined gender roles, a lack of positive touching and affection, and the lack of openness in regards to bodies and sexuality was described by women. Indepth descriptions of the abuse demonstrated that the abusers' coercion was on a continuum which ranged from acts of physical violence to disguises. Some abusers used physical violence to overcome the child's resistance or to assert their male privilege of power; whereas, other abusers sought to disguise the abuse in the form of punishment, games, affection, or sex education.

In regards to the survivors of childhood sexual abuse, a survival cycle was used as a framework for understanding the consequences of sexual abuse. "The Survivor's Cycle" (p. 111) organized the consequences of abuse into the following five categories: (a) confusion, (b) self-estrangement, (c) survival skills, (d) entrapment, and (e) negative sense of self. Confusion described how survivors experienced uncertainty about their personal rights, abilities, boundaries, and reality. Self-estrangement resulted from the felt confusion and essentially described how survivors relinquished their own feelings and perceptions in favour of the feelings and perceptions of others. As a result of self-estrangement survivors developed an assortment of survival skills which allowed them to cope with the abuse. The coping strategies were: intellectualizing, hiding, being passive, using humor, being a helper, acting out and escaping. Entrapped by their efforts to deal with the abuse, survivors were also entrapped by secrecy, guilt and their sense of personal complicity. Finally, a negative sense of self developed as a consequence of the entrapment. As adults, the cycle continued to dominant their lives. However, women counteracted the cycle by reclaiming themselves (Women's Research Center,1989).

Lepine's (1985) study also described the lived experience of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Overwhelmingly, all of the survivors reported that the experience of incest was negative. Lepine (1985) found that to cope with the incest and the feelings which resulted from it, women used both socially acceptable and undesirable behaviors . For example, of the socially acceptable behaviors used to cope were listed as "reading, spending time with friends, using their intelligence, daydreaming and achieving scholastically". The socially undesirable behaviors were listed as "contemplating suicide, isolating themselves from others, cutting off from feelings, overeating, taking drugs, rebelling, and feeling superior" (Lepine, 1985, p. 56). While the majority of Lepine's (1985) study is devoted to descriptions of the women's experience and methods they used to coped, she also briefly described the meaning which three women derived from their abuse experiences. Three of the women found meaning from the strength they received in having gone through the experience.

Two additional studies found that survivors of incest do derive meaning from the experience. In Draucker's (1992) study, 38% of the women who experienced incest reported that they were able to find positive meaning from the experience. Positive benefits were: (a) an increased ability to relate to other victims, (c) understanding the cause of the abuse, (c) becoming stronger or more aware of one's strength, and (d) introspection leading to self-understanding. While, the experience of incest is thought to a very traumatic one which shatters the schema that the world is a orderly and meaningful place, a search for meaning is thought to be partly an attempt to rebuild the shattered schemas and in part an attempt to work through the trauma. Silver, Boon and Stones (1983) found that nearly 50% of incest survivors were able to find meaning from their experience. However, Silver and her associates (1983) investigate how meaning affected adjustment. Women who were able to acquire meaning experienced less psychological distress, better social adjustment, higher levels of self-esteem, and less disruptive ruminations of the abuse as compared to the women who were not able to make sense of the experience.

It is obvious that we are still on the dawn of knowing what there is know about the phenomenon of incest. After reviewing what is known and comparing this to my own experience it became obvious to me that many questions were still not answered by the literature.

F. What is Not Known About Childhood Sexual Abuse

As I stood on the junction of what was known and what was not known, I discovered that I much of the research I had read focused on the many negative consequences that could occur to survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Focusing my attention from the junction to my inner self, I found this created a feeling of uneasiness. My uneasiness stemmed mainly the from way in which women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse were viewed in some of the research, that is they were regarded as clinical entities. I know that the research had merely reflected the effects of what survivors were experiencing and that this is not entirely negative as knowing that childhood sexual abuse is damaging to the survivor highlights the seriousness of the crime and the need for strong preventive measures. Yet, I still felt that there was more to the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse. Something was missing. I sensed that there was more to the experience than simply experiencing the symptoms. In addition, women were not often able to speak as they wished on the subject of incest. Women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have often lived with the taboo and the code of secrecy. Articulation of their experiences is therefore important as until recently women were not given the opportunity to even acknowledge their experiences. It was my desire to hear women speak about their experiences.

Many questions flowed out, but settling on one question in particular appeared to be difficult as so many question were unanswered. Knowledge of the women who experienced childhood sexual abuse was very scant.

My first question, a very general one, simply sought to discover the experiences of women who were sexually abused in childhood. As women told stories of their lives, I wanted to gain a general sense of their experiences. With the exception of the three studies, which were done by Kondora (1993), Lepine (1985), and Women's Research Center (1989) the literature on childhood sexual abuse lacked such general descriptions. My motivation for asking this question was two fold. First of all, I wanted to be able to describe the experience in a general way as to contribute to the field in an academic way. Secondly, I wished to be able to describe the experience as to assist other survivors in their journeys towards recovery.

My second question, was a more specific question , and sought to discover the experiences of women as they came to terms with the question of why the abuse occurred to them. As I previously described the literature, the exact way in which women constructed explanations for the abuse was not described. Past approaches, have largely, dealt with this question in a very static manner, viewing the explanations which women constructed as being categories which either attributed causation to themselves, others, chance or society. I knew from own experience, that this did not even begin to describe my experience.

My third question, was the most specific question, and sought to discover the experiences of women as they blamed themselves for the sexual abuse. This question was linked to the second question which sought to describe the experience of women as they came to terms with the question of why the abuse had occurred. From the literature, it did appear that many women did indeed seek to explain the abuse by focusing on themselves. However, previous studies described self-blame from the perspective of adjustment and failed to reflect the experience of women as they blamed themselves.

Thus, I was orientated to the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse from the standpoint of how women experienced childhood sexual abuse, the question of why this happened to them and to the aspect of self-blame.

III. METHODOLOGY/AND APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

A. Methodology

As I moved away from the junction, with the questions swirling through my mind, I knew that the questions set forth a direction. The direction of the path led to the world of inductive research where discovery and description were ongoing events. But before I could step in to this world, I needed to solve a conflict for myself. The conflict was associated with what I perceived to be a dichotomy: research is "bad" if it has originated from the inductive approach and "good" if it is deductive. In trying to assimilate a different view, I turned a full circle and created the opposite dichotomy: research is "good" if it has originated from the inductive approach and "bad" if it is deductive. As time went on, I recognized the dichotomy, and started to see the merits of each approach. While the deductive approach is very useful when one seeks to explain the relationships which exist between phenomenon (Hunt, 1991), as was demonstrated in the literature review on adjustment and the factors which are associated with sexual abuse, a deductive approach is not useful when a description of a phenomenon is being sought (Field & Morse, 1985). In the case of childhood sexual abuse, several aspects of the phenomenon have not been described. Therefore, my choice of an inductive approach, that is of phenomenology, was based on my desire to fill in some of gaps in the phenomenon of childhood sexual abuse.

The task at hand was to set forth a method as to describe the experiences of women. The following section describes how this was accomplished and includes a description of the phenomenological approach and of the procedures which were used to sample and conduct the interviews.

Phenomenology

What exactly is hermeneutical phenomenology? It is the study of the essences. Essences are actually descriptions of the phenomenon. Descriptions are deliberately written to capture the nature and significance of the phenomenon. This is not just a factual endeavor, as the phenomenologist is concerned with the lived experience and uses lived experience to describe the essences. Lived experience is our everyday experience which we are not aware of until we stop to reflect on them. Yet lived experience is not just any experience, as lived experience reflects the meaning structures of the phenomenon. The phenomenologist gleans the meaning out of the experience and in this sense the phenomenologist is practicing hermeneutics as this is an act of interpretation (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as the mode of inquiry for several reasons. First, hermeneutic phenomenology distinctively acknowledges that persons are a pivotal point of inquiry, and places a focus on the uniqueness of each person. I believed that women who have experienced incest often experience objectification during the abuse; that is, they do not experience the quality of being a person. There is a lack of an "I and Thou" relationship during the abuse. Anything which further reinforces the pattern of objectification is not healthy and is something that I wished to avoid in my research. However, this is not to say that the phenomenologist is not objective. To the phenomenologist, to be objective means that the inquirer is orientated to the phenomenon, wishing to "...describe it, interpret it, yet remaining faithful to it" (van Manen, 1990, p. 20). Yet at the same time, the interviewer is subjective in their orientation, meaning that they use their insights in order to illuminate the object which is being studied.

The second reason for choosing hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology is that this approach acknowledges that the human mind has the ability to form meanings through living in the world. Furthermore, the aim of phenomenology is to discover the nature of meanings of everyday experiences. I was interested in going beyond symptoms to delve into the essence of the phenomenon of incest. It was out of the knowing of my own experience that I simply knew that the essence of my own experience or that of other women had not been described.

My final reason for choosing hermeneutical phenomenology is that research as carried out in the true spirit of this method is an act of caring. As it attaches one to the world, the researcher becomes more fully a part of the world through questioning and finding out the intimacies of the experience of being in the world (van Manen, 1990). It was a deep sense of caring for other women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse that allowed me to question what the nature of the experience was. Certainly, I sensed that the experience was much more than the collection of negative symptoms. The caring aspect was indeed an integral part of my experience and orientation to the research question. I cared about other women who experienced childhood sexual abuse, not out of a sense of sympathy, but out of a respect for their triumph in surviving.

The Nature of the Research Question

The importance of the research question can not be understated. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the question " interrogate(s) something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being" (van Manen, 1990, p. 43). Undoubtedly, the question was more than an intellectual endeavor due to the personal stake and the centrality to me, the researcher. Furthermore, the question asks what is the nature of a phenomenon. I questioned what the nature of the phenomenon was and asked the following questions:

1). What is the experience of women who have been sexually abused in childhood ?

2). What is the experience of women as they come to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse occurred?

3). "How do women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse experience self-blame?"

Overview of the Study

To answer these questions, I conducted indepth interviews of nine women who experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse. Indepth interviewing necessitated a small sample size, as the object was to obtain data which captured the lived experience and essence of childhood sexual abuse. Even following the interviewing, meticulous transcribing and analysis of the interviews necessitated the use of a small sample size. Obtaining a depth of information required attention to details in every phase of the study. This is, of course, is a very different approach from deductive research, where the depth of information is not a concern. A nonrandom sampling procedure was used as the results do not generalize in phenomenological research. The following sections describe the type of sampling and interviewing procedures which were used.

Sampling

I decided to limit the study to adult women over the age of 18 years of age who had experienced childhood sexual abuse by members of their immediate families (grandparents, cousins or uncles)or extended families. As defined in this research, intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse included sexual relations between any family members who are related through blood, marriage or by means of primary positions of relatedness. Childhood sexual abuse was restricted to contact sexual abuse. This included any type of touching which was sexual such as fondling, kissing in a sexual manner, rubbing, and oral, anal or vaginal intercourse.

Two strategies were used to invite women who had experienced childhood sexual abuse to participate in the study: the use of paid advertisements and the use of a poster. An ad which ran in a local paper asked women who were 18 and over and who had been sexually abused as a child to respond if they wished to volunteer for the study. (See Appendix A for a copy of the advertisement.) A poster which advertised the study was posted in various buildings on the University of Alberta campus. (See Appendix B for a copy of the poster.)

The response rate was more than what I expected. Approximately 30 women called to participate in the study. Women were not screened over the telephone so the first 14 women who wanted to participate in the study did so after they were informed of the study and signed the consent form. One woman's recording of the interview was lost due to malfunction of the tape recorder. Unfortunately, she did not agree to redo the interview, as a result this yielded a group of 13 women. Out of the 13 women, 9 had clearly experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse, 2 had clearly experienced childhood sexual abuse from non-family members, and 2 women had been sexually abused by individuals who were more difficult to label as family or non-family. One women's abuser was her grandmother's boyfriend and the other women's abuser was her fourth cousin. These interviews were transcribed. After careful consideration and reading for the context in which women spoke of the abusers we decided that these 2 women did not consider the abusers to be family and therefore should not be included. This resulted in a sample size of 9 women who had experienced intrafamilial abuse. This sample size was judged to be adequate on the basis of the quality of information which was collected from the women.

Characteristics of the Nine Women

The age range for the 9 women was from 19 years to 55 years of age. Age is of importance as it did affect how women were processing the incest. For example, the 19 year old woman was just starting to deal with the childhood sexual abuse. All participants were Caucasian. All but one of the 9 women were educated at the university level. The sample included a physician, teacher, librarian, archaeologist,homemaker, and university students. Five of the 9 women were married, 2 were single and one woman was separated having fled an abusive marriage. Family of origin backgrounds of the women included both middle class and working class backgrounds.

All of the women experienced intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse and this was the basis for inclusion in the data analysis. Five of the women were victimized by one family member and 4 women were victimized by multiple family members. Among the 5 women who were victimized by a single family member, the perpetrators included the family positions of grandfather, brother and father. While these 5 women were victimized by only one family member, 2 of them were also sexually abused by nonfamily members. One woman, who was abused by her brother, experienced a gang rape in childhood by neighborhood boys. And one woman,who was a victimized by her father, was also sexually abused by a male neighbor. Of the 4 women who were victimized by multiple family members, one woman was molested by nine family members (a grandfather, two uncles, four cousins and two brothers) one was molested by two brothers, one was molested by a cousin and an uncle, and one woman was molested by her brothers, father, grandfather, and her brother-in-law. Notably, all of the women's intrafamilial abusers were male. Only one woman was sexually assaulted by a female who was a peer.

All of the women, except one, had been in or were currently involved in, therapy. As would be expected, the women were at different stages in their healing journey. Two of the women had recently remembered repressed memories (within 1 year of the interview), one woman had remembered for approximately 2 years, one woman remembered for approximately 4 years, 2 women had remembered for 7 years and the remaining 3 women had varying degrees of memories of the abuse which had been intact for longer than 20 years.

Procedure for Initial Telephone Contact

My initial contact with women was over the phone. Eight of the 9 women found out about the study from the advertisement which was run in a local paper, while one woman found out about the study from the posters which were posted on the campus of the University of Alberta. After women identified themselves as having seen the advertisement or the poster, the following information about the study was shared with women.

> "The study is an attempt to describe the experiences of women who had experienced sexual abuse as children. You are not required to give me your name for the study, but you may use a false name if you wish. The interview will ask you to tell me your story and why you thought the sexual abuse occurred. The interview will be taped with your permission, but every effort is made to ensure that identity remains unknown. The tapes will be typed, but all names or information which could identify you will be deleted from the transcript. The interview should take about 2 hours in length to complete. Do you have any questions?"

After questions were answered, the women were asked if they were interested in participating in the study. If they respond negatively, they were thanked for their interest and informed that if they had any further questions or if the women decided that they would like to participate they could call back. If women appeared to feel ambiguous about participating, I suggested that women think about it. Women were told to call back if they decided to participate.

If women clearly wanted to participate, a date and time for the study was arranged. Women were given a choice as to where they wanted to have the interview conducted: at their home; at the University of Alberta; or in another location which was convenient to the women, such as my home. Two of the 9 women decided to have the interview done in their homes, 6 decided to have the interview at the University of Alberta and one woman decided to have the interview conducted in my home. The time for the interview was arranged according to women's schedules.

Women who called were told that the interview would be approximately 2 hours in length. The option of doing the interview in two sessions was presented as an option in the event that the interview became too taxing in terms of time or emotions. However, all of the interviews were done in one session and ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes in length.

The Interview

In gathering the data, interviewing represented a critical component of the study. Therefore I have presented a discussion of the crucial aspects of the interview which includes the procedure used to conduct the interview, the design of the interview, the interview questions, tone of the interview, the conclusion of the interview and feminist aspects of the interview.

Procedure used to Conduct the Interview

When the interview was conducted at the University of Alberta I greeted and introduced myself to the women as they arrived at the office. After offering the women coffee, tea or juice, they were made to feel comfortable by engaging in small talk. The small talk consisted of introducing myself and talking about the weather or how easy it was for women to find the University. No matter where the interview was conducted, I spent a brief period of time on introductions and in engaging in small talk. Following the brief introductory period which was used for building rapport, I reviewed the purpose of the study, the procedure which was used to conduct the study, the side effects which could be experienced as a consequence of participating in the study, the provisions which were made to maintain confidentiality, the amount of time the interview would take, provisions for withdrawal at any point in the study, and where women could pick up the research results. This information was recorded on an information sheet; women were given a copy of the information for their own records. (See Appendix C for a copy of this information sheet.) The provisions for withdrawal were stressed to ensure that the women did not feel pressured to be interviewed. They were informed that the interviews would be taped with their permission, and only if they were comfortable with this. Not a single woman refused to have the taping done. In addition, women were told that they could shut off the tape recorder at any point in the interview. A number of women asked to shut off the tape recorder, but this was due to interruptions such as the ringing of the telephone or to ask for a break. Women were informed before the consent form was signed that the tapes would be transcribed. Women were also informed that the tapes would be destroyed following the transcription and that their names and the names of family members, friends, pets, etc., would not be included in the typed transcripts. In addition, they were informed that any discussion of the persons involved in the study would be done within the context of describing the sample's demographic characteristics and would not be related to the individual's quotations. Taping began after we reviewed the information sheet, I answered any questions, and the women read and signed the consent form. (See Appendix D for a copy of the consent form.)

Design of the Interview

The design for interviewing was a guided interview format. The guided interview format is not as informal as the conversational interview, nor is it as structured as the formal interview where all questions are prepared in advance and administered in a strict sequential manner. With the guided format, I sought to cover a list of topics. The purpose of the questions which were being investigated remained in my mind, to ensure that meaningful and relevant data was collected. Yet at the same time I was very careful not to force or lead the responses which were being sought from the women (Patton, 1990). Since this requires a considerable amount of interviewing skill, I reviewed the first two interviews in order to evaluate and improve the quality of the interview. Reviewing interviews was done with my thesis supervisor who listened to two of the taped interviews shortly following the interviewing.

The Interview Questions

The questions which guided the interview were formulated before the interviewing began. The first two questions asked women to reveal their motivations for participating in the study. The questions were worded as follows:

1). Before I begin the interview I would like to know what prompted you to answer the ad in the paper?

2). What would you like to obtain from this interview?

There were two reasons for asking these questions at the beginning of the interview. First of all, in asking the questions I was provided with an opportunity to find out what the women's needs were. As a consequence I could determine if it would be possible to meet the needs of the women. The second reason was to clarify with women which expectations would be unfulfilled through their participation in the study. This allowed me to provide boundaries. The women were very realistic in regards to what needs could be met through the study. As a consequence, both their needs and my need for the information were met.

The third question was designed to capture demographic information. It was worded as follows:

3). Can you tell me about yourself? For example: Are you working? Do you have a partner? What is your educational background? Do you have any children? Do you have any religious involvement? Ethnic background? Family background? Siblings? Eldest? Children?

By strategically placing the above question at this point in the interview allowed women to reveal less threatening aspects of themselves, thereby building rapport.

The fourth question asked women to tell their stories. The question was worded as follows:

4). If you are ready, I would like you to tell me your story?

Women were able to describe in their own words what their experience of childhood sexual abuse was. The open ended question allowed women to describe their experiences in their own way. This allowed me to respectfully find out what type of childhood sexual abuse the women had experienced, as only those who experienced intrafamilial sexual abuse were included in the data analysis.

The fifth, sixth and seventh questions addressed the issues of why women thought childhood sexual abuse occurred to them. The questions were worded as follows:

5). Have you ever asked why me? Tell me why you think this happened to you?

6). When you think about the abuse, what are the reasons which come to your mind?

7). I would like you to think back to when you were a child/adolescent. As a child/adolescent did you ever wonder why this was happening to you? Tell me the reasons why you thought this was happening to you?

The fifth and sixth questions addressed the heart of the study. I was interested in the experience of women as they questioned why the sexual abuse occurred to them. It was necessary to ask women if they had ever asked "why me?" The sixth question was designed to encourage the women to talk about the reasons and their experience of "why me?" I asked the seventh question to clarify if women had asked the questions as children or as adolescents. The occurrence of repression is not uncommon among survivors of childhood sexual abuse so therefore this question was asked to clarify if they were aware of the question "why me?" as children and how it had arisen. The seventh question was not the primary focus of the research, therefore the data analysis does not concentrate on this aspect.

Questions number 8 and 9 represented the questions which addressed the experience of self-blame. They were worded as follows:

8). Many women mention at times, that they blame themselves. Have you ever blamed yourself?

9). How have you experienced the self-blame?

Because all survivors do not blame themselves for the childhood sexual abuse, it was necessary to ask if they had ever blamed themselves. If any of the women did blame themselves they were asked to describe their experience of self-blame through question 9.

Finally, the last two questions were asked out of curiosity. They were worded as follows:

10). How has your understanding of the abuse changed over time?

11). Tell me about your family situation. Has this contributed to the sexual abuse you experienced?

The questions were asked in a sequential manner if women did not spontaneously talk about a certain topic. Probes were used to assist women to continue talking. For example, I would paraphrase what women had said and ask them to tell me more or to continue. When women were telling their stories, I used probing questions if some part of story was not clear or was missing.

Tone of the Interview

Throughout the interviewing, I observed for signs of emotional upset. If any of the women involved became overtly distressed I asked women if they wanted to take a break or if they were comfortable with continuing. None of the women asked to prematurely terminate an interview. I had prepared myself to assist women to find emotional support in the event that women were overly distressed. However, none of the women required this service.

Conclusion of the Interview

As the interview came to an end, I thanked women for their participation. Women were given a resource list and a final information sheet. (See Appendix E for a copy of the resource list and Appendix F for a copy of the final information sheet.) The resource list outlined some of the supportive counselling agencies which were available for women who had experienced sexual abuse. The final information sheet thanked women for their participation and gave the address and telephone of the University of Alberta in order to obtain the research results if this was desired.

Interviewing began in February of 1992 and finished in June of 1992. Interviews were spaced out to allow time to have each interview transcribed and to be assimilated by myself. Transcription was done by a paid typist who did not type in any names and other identifying data in to the transcripts. The reason for choosing to have someone else do the transcribing was to create psychological distance as interviewing was often very emotional.

Feminist Aspects of the Interview

A feminist philosophy influenced how the interviews were conducted. More specifically, feminism was reflected in the establishment of trust, in operating from a stance of believing the stories of women, and in how my self-disclosure was used. Reinharz stated that feminism is concerned with the establishment of trust as this facilitates self-disclosure (Reinharz, 1992). Establishing trust in the case of this study was accomplished in two ways. First, by assuming the role of an interested listener I was able to establish trust. I did not assume to be the expert or the scientist, but merely as another woman wanting to describe and discover what they had to say. In effect, this allowed power to equalize in the interview. Secondly, trust was also developed as I told women during the interview that they were courageous for telling their stories. The general feeling tone imparted to women was one of support.

The issue of being an unbiased objective bystander certainly did not fit my stance. I was orientated to believing the stories of women. The issue of the reliability of women's memories was not an issue for this study. The assumption which I adopted was that this was not a court of law where women had to prove that they were abused. I assumed that their stories were authentic.[4]

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[4] Reliability is of course a very contentious issue at the moment, with the argument having becoming polarized on the issue of whether or not repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse are true (Berlinger & Loftus, 1992). Generally, experts recognize that the memories of all children and adults are fallible and are subject to influence. Yet, it is also known that adults and children can accurately recall traumatic events. The exact ways in which repression and dissociation work is not yet understand, so the verdict on the reliability of repressed or dissociated

Believing the participant is in keeping with a feminist method as opposed to the more scientific attitude of skepticism in approaching the study of phenomenon (Reinharz, 1992).

Reinharz stated that "researchers who self-disclose are reformulating the researcher's role in a way that maximizes engagement of the self...", but there is "...no single feminist perspective on researcher-interviewee relations and self-disclosure" (1992, p. 34). My own style for self-disclosure was based on the needs of the women I interviewed. If women asked about my experience with childhood sexual abuse I told them that I had been sexually abused during my childhood. This self-disclosure was used to facilitate the women's comfort and self-disclosure.

Gaining the comfort of the women I interviewed was an essential part of the interview for I recognized that the depth of the descriptions provided by women would depend on the rapport I established with them. The interview, as such, was a very important part of the study, thus, its execution had to be carefully thought out. Successful interviewing simply demanded this.

Thus far, I have described the procedure I used to conduct the interviews and in the earlier sections I described the procedures for sampling and initial telephone contact. The methodology was my road map in the world of inductive research and I used this map as a guide in order to accomplish the tasks of doing the study. The map was useful, for eventually the tasks of transcribing and interviewing came to an end and I was ready to begin the data analysis.

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memories in the scientific community is not yet out. The point which I need to stress for the purpose of this study is that for many women who volunteered their time and the painful intimate details of their lives, being not believed was a salient issue in their lives. For example, one woman who disclosed to her mother, was subsequently accused of having the False Memory Syndrome by her father. Another woman, who did have the courage to disclose the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, was not believed by her mother until the perpetrator acknowledged the sexual abuse. The purpose of this study was not to investigate the authenticity of the women's stories. Despite the fact that the issue of reliability of repression was not investigated, it did arise spontaneously from women's stories. As will be demonstrated in the data analysis, some women initially experienced disbelief when they remembered what had been repressed and sought to confirm or validate the memories for themselves.

B. Approach to Data Analysis

I was now ready to embark on the task of doing the data analysis. My map at this point became van Manen's Researching Lived Experience (1990) and my feminist ideology. However, I must confess that this map lead me to a wide road where many different researchers were met. My biggest fear was that I was not doing phenomenology in the right way. Nevertheless, I did continue on the wide road with my book in one hand and my fear in the other hand. Presented below is a description of van Manen's road map and of the feminist ideology, which I used to analyze the data.

After receiving the transcripts, I read through the transcripts and presented the main points from the transcripts to my thesis supervisor. This allowed me to familiarize myself with the transcripts. Once this had been accomplished the process of reading and re-reading began in order to identify emerging themes.

Two methods were used to uncover thematic aspects in the transcripts: the holistic or sententious approach and the selective or highlighting approach, both according to van Manen (1990). In regards to the holistic approach, the whole transcript was read. Following this I produced a phrase or sentence which captured the significance of the text as a whole. For some texts, it was very difficult to reduce the whole transcript to a single sentence or phrase. It became obvious that this method lost most of the text and its significance and was an inappropriate approach for the purpose of this research.

The selective approach required that the texts be read and re-read to identify which sentences revealed the essence of the phenomenon. Revealing statements were then highlighted and thematic statements were composed from the selected text. The highlighting and thematic statements were written directly onto a computer copy of the transcripts. A small research group was then used as a validity check. The research group's membership varied from two to four members. Two consistent members, who were my thesis supervisor and a graduate student, anchored the research group while two other graduate students became involved at various points in the research. Members were selected on the basis of their research interest.

Theoretical validity was used in the manner as defined by Maxwell (1992). Maxwell refers to theoretical validity as the emerging concepts and categories and their subsequent relationships to one another. The establishment of theoretical validity was accomplished by taking the thematic statements and the corresponding themes which emerged from all of the texts to the research seminar, which according to Maxwell, (1992) is the way in which theoretical validity is established. It was here that the members of the research group acted as collaborators in the process, providing feedback as to whether or not the interpretive text appeared to be valid. Prior to reading the highlighted thematic statements, the members of the research group had read the transcribed interviews.[5] Therefore they were able to provide a check to the validity of the emerging themes.

As the small research group became involved in the data analysis, it became important to present the women as individuals instead of nameless entities. I found myself describing each interview to help the research group place the themes into context. Since this was time consuming each women was assigned a pseudonym. It was easier to understand emerging themes when they were connected to assumed identities. The style which was adopted in the research group continued as I started to write. That is, I continued to use the pseudonyms which were given to women. Where the deleted names of the women's friends, relatives or pets had been deleted from the transcripts, I created pseudonyms to assist in the reading of the text.

In writing the text, quotations which best reflected the emerging themes were utilized. Of course, validity checks were used in this phase of the data analysis. Some of the original quotations I used were discarded as the quotations did not fit with the subthemes, while others which were suggested by the research group were incorporated. The text went through many revisions as the study progressed.

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[5] All names and identifying information had been removed from the transcribed text.

Role of Feminism in the Data Analysis

Feminism is an integral belief system of mine and certainly influenced how I analyzed and interpreted the data. To describe feminism is not an easy task as feminism is not just one set of beliefs, for there are many different types of feminist thought. For example there are the radical, liberal, Marxist, psychoanalytical and postmodernist feminist schools of thought (Tong, 1989). In applying a label to myself, I would say that I fit best with the radical feminists who deal with the concepts of male power over women, biology as not destiny, male sexual domination in the forms of pornography, incest and woman battering, and the issue of liberation from oppression. The myriad of theoretical writings are as diverse within the radical school of thought as they are within feminism itself. Therefore the ensuing discussion has grossly simplified radical feminism.

Radical feminism asserts that gender roles and reproductive roles in a patriarchal system serve to establish the male role as dominant and the feminine role as subordinate. Power over others is the domination stance of patriarchy; a stance which is destructive and controlling. Constructive power provides individuals with the power to act. In regards to sexual roles, dominance over and violence are frequent ways that male sexuality is expressed. Rape and incest provide examples of sexual dominance, generally of women by men (Tong, 1989).

In regards to incest, a feminist analysis asserts that patriarchy has created a social structure of the family in which the father is dominant, the mother is subordinate and the nurturer, and the child is dependent and passive. The pressure to maintain silence and the intactness of the family originates from the male perpetrators who generally have the most power. Traditional perspectives have misplaced the responsibility for sexual abuse to the mother and child which only serves to maintain patriarchy. Feminism does not excuse men for sexual abuse on the basis of pathological personalities nor does it assign responsibility to children or women (Hall & Lloyd, 1989).

From my own experience, it became obvious that the philosophical underpinnings of radical feminism fit with the type of experiences that I had in my family of origin. My own sexuality had indeed been exploited by a powerful family member, someone who had power over me. An experience such as this does say something about how the world is structured. The social structure of my family mirrored the structures which were also described in our society. It is obvious that I was deeply committed to feminism. Although I approached the data analysis by allowing themes to emerge from the data rather that checking for the existence of pre-determined themes or concepts, the themes I identified and my interpretation of text was clearly guided by my feminist beliefs.

Limitations of the Findings

Phenomenology does not seek to explain or predict the relationships between various concepts. Therefore the results obtained will not be used to refute or validate a set of hypotheses, but are meant to reflect the experiences of women as they answered the question of why they were abused and as they experienced self-blame.

The sample was neither random nor representative, therefore the results will pertain to women who are similar to the women who volunteered to participate in the study. Volunteering for the study sets the participants apart from other abused women who may not be ready to speak on the subject of childhood sexual abuse. The women who participated do not reflect the type of experiences that Aboriginal women may have, or of immigrant women, or of men, or lower class and uneducated women; the group who volunteered for the study were well educated, white and primarily middle class.

One other limitation pertains to a clinical issue. All of the women who participated in the study, with the exception of one woman, had been in or were currently involved in therapy. Their voices will reflect the therapy experience.

Motivations for Participating

At the beginning of each interview, I asked women to disclose their reasons for participating. Four different reasons for why the women responded to the advertisement were given as follows: (a) to assess where they were at in terms of talking about the sexual abuse, (b) the desire to contribute something, (c) the desire to speak out, and (d) the need to talk someone who is impartial.

To Assess Where They Were at in Terms of Talking About the Sexual Abuse

One woman responded to the question "What would you like to obtain from the interview?" by saying,

> *I don't know if I have any goals for myself but if I can get through these 2 hours and talk about it I'll show you how far I've come in dealing with all of this though, so.*

Another woman stated:

> *I haven't a clue. I just want to see how I react. That's all.*

The two women saw the study as an opportunity to assess how far they had progressed. Undoubtedly, there are few opportunities to discuss one's experiences of childhood sexual abuse, participating in a study would provide such an opportunity.

The Desire to Contribute Something

For other women, the motivation to participate in the interview was out of a desire to contribute to the understanding of the topic or to be helpful. For example, one women stated:

> *I guess I thought if I can -- even if this early stage of working through my own abuse and make a difference or you know be able to contribute somewhere along the line to some understanding or -- so it's not just my process but it can help or...*

The Desire to Speak Out

For one woman the motivation to respond to the advertisement was out of the desire to speak out on the subject. She states:

> *I think that probably for me it's just that I am reaching a point where I don't know how else to put it in terms of my life experience* **I am ready to stand up and be counted**. *Do you know what I mean? I think for years and years I felt very reticent. I feel that I am not like an average person in the sense that I can very casually share my history with other people. They wouldn't understand*

> *or it would be difficult or things of that nature. And I am just reaching a point in my life I think like where I am sort of ready to let go of that.*

The Need to Talk to Someone Whc is Impartial

The last motive which was apparent was the need to talk to someone who would be impartial and who would allow the woman to disclose.

One woman stated :

> *I never really thought of that but I think I would like to be able to get some stuff out into the open into, yes. And I don't know --just talk it out with someone other than a friend or a psychologist or something like that. Someone who is totally impartial and who knows absolutely nothing about.*

Where women were at in terms of talking about the sexual abuse and the need to talk someone who is impartial could be categorized as personal motivations. The desire to contribute something and the desire to speak could be categorized as reaching out to others. Whatever motivation was present, it was evident that the women were very brave souls for coming forward. They had opened the doors of their worlds allowing the journey of inductive research to take place.

The journey in the world of inductive research started a long time ago. The map I clutched had guided me through the world of inductive research. Sighing, I turned around to look at the long road I hence travelled. In the far distance, I recognized the point where I stepped into this world with the questions swirling in my mind. I reminded myself as I travelled the road and searched for answers, that questions were my reasons for being in this world.

IV. THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A SURVIVOR AND OF BEING VICTIMIZED

My first research question sought to understand the experience of women who were sexually abused. Using the selective approach to uncover themes, two distinct macro-themes emerged from the experiences described by the nine women: the experience of being a survivor and the experience of victimization. Each of these macro-themes included a number of sub-themes or experiences related to each other and contributed to the experience of being a survivor or the experience of victimization.

A. The Experience of Being a Survivor

What is the experience of being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse? What emerged appeared to be a process of gradual recovery as women survived the experience. Although, it was never my intention to look for process, the experiences which emerged were described by women in this manner. There were commonalties in all of the women's experience and there were clearly, unique aspects. The following description attempts to capture both.

Surviving the experience involved the crucial aspect of becoming aware of the experience. Women experienced different ways of gaining awareness of the sexual abuse. Awareness of the event was gained by the women through three different ways: labelling, knowing and remembering. Once women gained awareness of the event, they had to accept the new knowledge. For those women who experienced remembering and knowing they also experienced a disbelief and a subsequent belief that this had occurred to them. Once the awareness of the event was present, women described making connections between the event and their feelings or behavior patterns. Feelings and behaviors patterns that never made any sense were connected to the event.

Once connections were made women appeared to engage in what has been called working through. This theme represented the healing work which women engaged in. While there was a great amount of variability in how and what sort of issues women worked through, several commonalties of the experience were found, these being: commitment to the process of healing, turning point - stopping the abuse, and meaning derived from the experience. The final theme was called moving on as this represented women's decisions to move beyond the abuse. Often women moved on to transcend former definitions of themselves, their sexuality, and relationships.

Presented below is a diagram which illustrates the experiences of being a survivor.

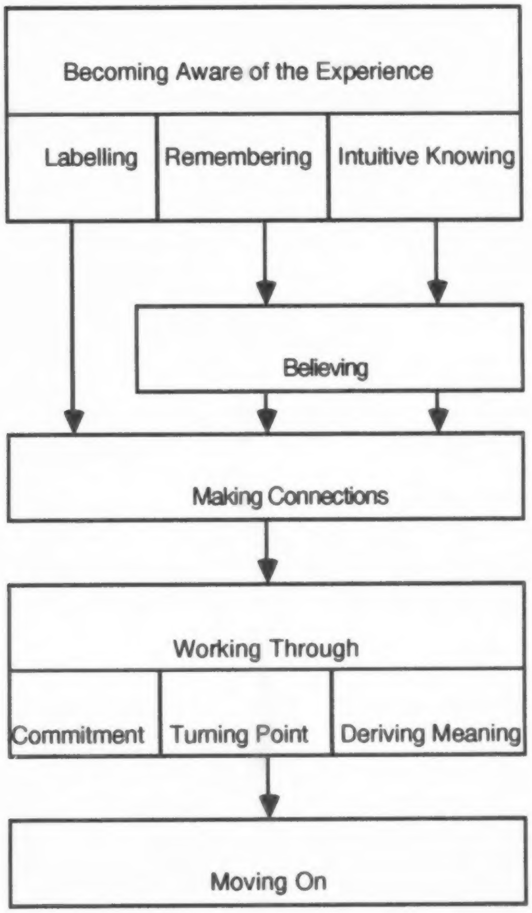
Becoming Aware of the Experience
Labelling
Remembering
Intuitive Knowing
Believing
Making Connections
Working Through
Commitment
Turning Point
Deriving Meaning
Moving On

Figure 1. Diagram of the experience of being a survivor.

While the diagram shows a chronological sequencing of the themes, in reality this process has not been tested and therefore is only representative of what these women described. The themes have been portrayed in this manner as it is easier to picture the themes and what appeared to be a process.

Labelling

Labelling is the act of naming the experience of childhood sexual abuse. When the experience of abuse was labelled (a therapist labelled the experience for one women and another woman labelled it herself), women interpreted what this experience was and as a consequence they understood this experience. Since the sexual abuse was experienced in childhood, it was not surprising that women discovered what this experience was in an ex post facto manner. Two of the nine women experienced labelling. For these two women the act of labelling was facilitated by reading books, attending college or through counselling.

Una who remembers the sexual abuse she experienced in adolescence, labelled her experience of sexual abuse later as she was attending college.

> *You know I never ever figured that out until I went to college and heard this incest one day and said, "My God. That's me."* ***You know and I thought how have I been going through this and not being able to say this is going on you know.***

There appeared to be an element of shock as Una stated *"My God. That's me."* Una realized for the first time she had been sexually abused and hence had difficulty in accepting that she was unable to name the incest prior to this point.

Mina, like Una, did not realize that she had experienced sexual abuse until after the abuse had ended. She gained her awareness as she talked to a counsellor. She stated:

> *I told him [the counsellor] about my brothers fondling my breasts when I was growing up and I just said I felt so horrible about all that. And he made a comment. He said that's incestuous behavior.* ***And I didn't realize that.*** *And I read a book....And it defined what sexual abuse is. And what incest is and realizing the extent that I had experienced [it] growing up. I sort of started working my way back.*

Mina, like Una had intact memories for the incident she named.

The act of labelling allowed women to understand the experience of sexual abuse. The experience is given a definition. Children who were raised before the seventies, as is the case for both Una and Mina, have not been exposed to prevention programs which teach children to name sexual abuse. Many families were not able to talk about sex or sexuality, providing little opportunity for children to learn to name sexual abuse. Therefore, it is not surprising that the act of labelling would occur in retrospect for both Mina and Una.

Intuitive Knowing

Intuitive knowing is another way of becoming aware of one's past history of sexual abuse. This refers to the use of intuition in gaining awareness. This was observed in only one woman, Helene, who had completely repressed all memories of sexual abuse. Helene attended group therapy and heard a girl's story. Helene called the person a "girl", but it is unknown if this person was actually a girl or a woman. On the basis of the girl's testimony, Helene had the intuitive sense that she was also sexually abused. She stated:

> *So I went to group therapy at the -at a hospital and I was in there for 4 months...and in the first day that I was there I listened to somebody telling a story* ***and I knew that what had happened to that girl had happened to me***

At this time Helene still had no memory.of the abuse. She goes on to state:

> *And the next day I heard another story and I said, yes, that's happened to me. And then I heard another one all in the first week and I thought* ***this is ridiculous****. This is all – you know I am just being numb. I don't want to hear this.* ***This is just nonsense. None of this could have really happened to me. So I didn't believe it at first.***

In the above excerpt, Helene referred to the intuition as being "ridiculous". There was an immediate sense of knowing something without the accompanying reasoning (Thatcher & McQueen, 1980), thus Helene had no proof or evidence that this had happened to her. This was hard to accept, as intuitive knowledge is often associated with a subjective type of knowledge which has been devalued in our Western world (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986).

Despite that fact that Helene knew she was sexually abused, she does not believe it happened. Helene demonstrated the fact it is possible to know something, but not believe it.

Remembering

Remembering refers to how women suddenly became aware that they were sexually abused. In Mina's case, she initially had some recollection of the abuse which involved her brothers, but not her father. Through a flashback, Mina suddenly remembered her father's sexual abuse. She also explained that she did not want to believe it.

> ***I had a flashback****. I remember the insect crawling in my ear with my father's tongue and I think it was when my mom was in the hospital for surgery or having my younger brother or sister that he was sexually frustrated and came into my bed and rubbed his penis underneath my nightie, up against my back and was sticking---****You know I don't want to believe this. It is hard to believe.***

Nicola, like Mina, had no recollection of being sexual abused by her father prior to a memory which first came to her as a "movie". She stated:

> ***I remember one night I was just lying in bed. It was like watching a movie go off*** *and I was aware of the room and it was – like my husband beside me he had fallen asleep and I was aware of where I was but it was just like watching this movie go off ...I remembered feeling like I was drowning – like I was under water and I couldn't come up and passing out and waking up and my dad saying, "Are you okay?"* ***And he was on top of me and he had nothing on and neither did I.*** *Anyways he tried to have intercourse with me and I had passed out....****At first I didn't want to believe it was my dad.***

Nicola,like Mina, did not want to believe that she was sexually abused by her father. For both women, an element of disbelief followed the remembering.

Believing

Believing refers to the process of accepting the event of childhood sexual abuse as being "real". Believing was relevant for one woman who gained an awareness of the experience through intuitive knowing (Helene) and for the women who gained an awareness of the experience through remembering (Nicola and Mina). Notably, believing was not relevant to the women who gained awareness of the sexual abuse through labelling.

Helene, who used intuitive knowing to gain awareness, moved from disbelief to belief as she accepted the "clear statement" of her rape as a "fact". She stated:

> *But at the end of the 4 months I knew that it was* ***real*** *and the first memory that came back wasn't even a memory. It was just a clear statement came to me that my brother had raped me when I was a little girl. But I didn't have any memory of it.* ***I just knew that it was a fact.***

Notice that in believing, Helene has called the intuitive knowledge a "fact". This acknowledges her acceptance of the childhood sexual abuse as a reality as facts are grounded in the world of reality.

Both Mina and Nicola, who gained awareness through remembering, had difficulty believing that they were sexually abused. Despite their difficulty in believing, both Mina and Nicola eventually accepted sexual abuse as a personal reality. Mina stated:

> ***It is hard to believe." And then realizing the most difficult things to know that it was true.*** *And to accept it as reality and that explained a lot of other things that I had kind of remembered around that time*

Notice how Mina stated that it was the "most difficult things to know".

Nicola stated:

> ***I think the other thing that's been hard to*** *-- with the memories is when* ***I realized it was my dad*** *-- this was early December. I became really suicidal at that point...*

Once Nicola accepted the reality of the abuse she became suicidal. It is obvious that such an admission is very traumatic. Fathers are entrusted to care, protect and guide their children into adulthood. Accepting the reality of childhood sexual abuse destroyed Mina's and Nicola's illusion that they were protected and cared for. Reality is the hard and cold truth of betrayal.

Thus far I have discussed the various ways in which women came to understand and believe that they have experienced childhood sexual abuse. The realization or awareness was gained from what I called labelling, intuitive knowing, remembering and believing. As I have pointed out, women who utilized labelling had intact memories while those who had experienced intuitive knowing and remembering did not have intact memories.

Making Connections

Making connections emerged as a central pattern in the analysis for each participant. Regardless of whether or not women repressed memories of the childhood sexual abuse or had relatively intact memories, they all demonstrated the tendency to try to make sense of their lives, this included the struggle to make sense of both feelings and behavior patterns in light of the childhood sexual abuse. Presented below are excerpts of women's stories which demonstrate this theme.

Diana, who formerly repressed her memories, made connections between her feelings and behavior and the fact that she was abused. She stated:

> ***I was abused*** *by my cousin and I think my uncle. It's probably why I am so cold.* ***I don't remember ever being a cold bitch before*** *all this happened. ...*
>
> *But I -- all throughout high-school since grade 9, I* ***was always constantly depressed and sad*** *and -- but I just didn't know why....But then* ***the abuse affected the way I acted*** *...*

Diana is now able to explain her depression and coldness in reference to the sexual abuse. This is detective work at its best.

Arla, who experienced father-daughter sexual abuse is able to understand her own thoughts and emotional needs in the context of the childhood sexual abuse. Arla discovered that her obsessive thoughts were like her father's compulsive sexual abuse; both patterns were attempts to meet their needs for emotional intimacy. She stated:

> *But for me to have that insight and it was a very hard won insight because I put up with two days of these obsessive thoughts about this person and then I realized ...I was obsessing on this kind of --something which is a real problem for me is a feeling, a craving to have a sense of real emotional intimacy with someone --not sexual although there is a sexual component to it but the sexual component is very minor. And it's not full blown sex at all. It is much more this profound longing for a real deep emotional intimacy,* ***and suddenly I just knew. I just knew that this is the reason that my father did the things that he did to me. This is his compulsion living through me and it was very uncanny because the moment that I had that realization the obsessive thoughts totally disappeared.***

The connection was made. The present was seen in light of the past; Arla knew why she was so obsessive and what motivated her father to act the way he did.

Mina, who remembered her father rubbing his penis up against her back through a flashback, commented on the significance of this memory:

> ***...And to accept it [her father rubbing his penis against her] as reality and that explained a lot of other things that I had kind of remembered around that time that I have always been scared of men.*** *Like I would have been four when that happened. Four or five. And I had always been scared of men. When a man walked into the house I hid. I crawled under the bed....* ***I really was always afraid of men and that explained it.***

Mina found the origin of her fear and.as a consequence was able to put her fear into a new context. The incest surrounded her memories of herself as the 4 year old who hid under the bed.

Walda, who had intact memories, made a connection between her life long depression and how it related back to the sexual abuse. She began by recalling the incident of abuse.

> *And I was fighting him off and finally my mother called him and my mother called me and he left and I just wanted to lay there and recover and my mother insisted that I go downstairs. I remember being so tired and so defeated and so depressed because there wasn't any way of winning this. If I wasn't fighting him off I was having to help with the work around the farm. I was just always tired and defeated. There wasn't any way to win.* ***I can remember from then on feeling depressed. Just made the connection during this last month and that is why I always had a problem with depression.***

At the heart of Walda's life long depression lies the loss of the experience of herself as capable or efficacious. This was a powerful connection.

Nicola also made a powerful connection between the fear she felt to a repressed memory of her perpetrator threatening her. Nicola's account began when she disclosed her memories of sexual abuse to her mother. Nicola's mother and father were unable to accept Nicola's disclosure and stated that they were going to confront Nicola's perpetrator. It is at this point that Nicola began to become very afraid. She stated:

> *You know when I hung up from them [her mother and father] saying this to me on the phone I* ***became irrationally fearful*** *and I called my husband right away at work and he said, "****You've got to call my parents and say that I don't want them doing that because I wouldn't be safe nor would my kids.****" And I said, "I'll move out of town like at a drop of the hat. We'll pack the moving van during the night and be gone in the morning." I mean it was that powerful ...****because I thought if he [the perpetrator] finds out -- I mean that's it.*** *You know my kids are history. It was really irrational and that lasted for a couple of months that I was irrationally fearful of him finding out that I had told so.*

Notice how Nicola had named her feared "irrational". It literally was irrational as the origin of the fear was unconscious. Once she remembered that she had been threatened by her abuser, her fear made sense, and it dissipated.

> ***After I started to remember*** *-- after I was talking with [my therapist] about the memories* ***there were two things that came over and over and that was a knife on the bedside table and a gun that kept coming right in front of my face*** *...over and over this came back to me...but after that it settled and I wasn't irrationally fearful.*

Helene's account was unique as the details of her story are specific to her life, but the pattern of making connections to the past sexual abuse, clearly was shared with other women. She began her story by relating the fact that she had been depressed for twenty years. She stated:

> *... I* ***couldn't succeed in anything because of the depression*** *and my husband had kept insisting that I continue with psychiatrists and I didn't like any of them, and it seemed to me like a waste of time.*

Prior to her entry into group therapy, Helene had no memory of her sexual abuse. After she entered group therapy, she remembered her brother had given her a box of chocolates after he sexually assaulted her. Helene was able to explain the panic she felt whenever she saw chocolates. She stated:

> *And he was very, very angry with me and* ***he actually violently pushed me up against a wall and abused me.*** *And then he said he was sorry.* ***He gave me a box of chocolates and then from then on whenever I saw chocolates I'd go into a panic and I didn't know what that was about.*** *It took a long time to clear up. And then every time from then on when he abused me he would give me chocolates so I got to the point where I thought that you know I mean everyone laughs about chocolates being sinful, but in this case it was the truth you know.*

Nadia connected the quality of her marital sex to the childhood sexual abuse she experienced. In making the connection she noticed that she was feeling depressed before her wedding anniversary.

> *It's my anniversary....**Why do I feel so down?...And then I realized it suddenly. I have been cheated. That old bastard [the perpetrator] has been in my bedroom from day one of our marriage and even then I didn't put it all together**. And then I mentioned that in the group when I was talking to the women in the church. "I feel so cheated." I said, "And [my husband] has been cheated because of my bedroom behavior....I was so angry that we had been cheated and **two days later the memory came back. He [the perpetrator] had managed to fondle me to the point of orgasm. And that's why I could never ...I could never let [my husband] do that**...Now I finally can find out deep down why I have never been able to give myself to my husband the way I should have and the way he deserved.*

All participants made connections which explained their feelings or behavior patterns. Prior to not knowing the reason for their feelings or moods, problems remained over time. Gaining a sense of connectedness with their past allowed the women to come to a resolution. The act of making connections put the feeling or behavior back into the context from which it arose. Once the connection was made a sense of normalcy could be restored to feelings or behaviors.

Have you ever started watching a movie after it was half over? It is sometimes difficult to put together the plot. Perhaps you have missed a crucial part of the plot, and now are trying to guess why the events are unfolding as they are. Then someone recaps the missing part, and suddenly you can explain some of the events. This is precisely what seemed to happen when women made connections. The process of making connections appears to be a journey of the self making its way back to the authentic self.

Working Through

Working through is a theme which represents women's efforts to heal the effects of abuse. For some women aspects of their healing had been completed, whereas, for other women their healing was just beginning. The areas which provided focal points for healing were: rage, negative patterns of thinking, self-blame, withdrawal, repression, and unworthiness.

In the following excerpt, Arla reflects on how she worked through the rage she felt towards her mother. She stated:

> ***I went to a psychiatrist for 3 years*** *and I think I probably dealt with all that I could have dealt with in that point in my life. But it* ***was really like the tip of the iceberg*** *and that's not an exaggeration. But you know from that experience I got a basis.* ***Through that experience I let go of a lot of rage.***

Working through the rage was only part of Arla's healing. In the following excerpt she recognized how hard it was to find her self and her feelings. She commented:

> *It's like* ***before you really even have a chance to evolve a personality someone else has put a claim on it.*** *It's just so -- it's like when you grow up and you try to find out who you are and what life is about and what you feel* ***you have to wade through so much garbage just to even get to the beginning point.***

In the following excerpt, Arla indicated her readiness to deal with the profound influence that her parents had on her sense of self. Arla stated:

> *I almost have the feeling sometimes that it is like you have this incredible sort of tragic love affair with someone [her father] and sometimes you have the overwhelming feeling of the tragedy of it, but you can't associate it with events....* ***And I am just at a point in my life now where I feel I can begin to deal with it. I think one of the most devastating things is about the kind of upbringing that I had is this whole identification process that on some psychic level it was many many years before I felt myself free of my mother and free of the kind of influence***

> ***that she had over me as a child. That that influence continued into my adulthood, even when I was actively you know trying to free myself of it.***

Working through the abuse was not a short term process, as Arla indicated it "just keeps going on and on". It appeared to represent a choice as to how she lived her life.

> *You know that's probably* ***a central focus in my life is letting go of the garbage.*** *And it's* ***a process that just keeps going on and on.*** *But you have to know the garbage first. You have to work with it. And that's just has to be. It's not pleasant but it has to be.*

Mina wanted to work through the negative thinking, but questioned how she could change. She stated:

> ***So finally I have taken a lot of the blame off myself and put it on that culture.*** *It sort of always takes my anger from people that have abused me and put it more on we're all a product of our culture, which has alleviated a lot of anxiety and frustration and confusion. But then there's also --* ***there's still some problems that are within myself. How can I change to better function in a world that I don't feel a part of and how can I stop having the tapes*** *-- the negative tapes play over and you know recognizing I am who I am because of all of this stuff, and can I change any of that?* ***Are there any things that have come out of that that's positive****?*

For Helene, the theme of working through was reflected in her struggle to relinquish self-blame. She stated:

> ***So that has taken me 7 years of therapy to even get this far. It's all because I kept thinking it was entirely my own fault for not looking after myself because after all everybody in the family*** *-- we grew up in a very wild area and we were all taught you have got to survive yourself. You've got to look after yourself.*

> *And so we learned young how to do that, and I didn't look after myself.* ***That was the way I saw it so there was something wrong with me. That was really hard.***

As Helene indicated, it took her 7 years to work through the self-blame, obviously it was a difficult transition.

Walda's healing involved connecting back to the world. She stated:

> *And then in my childhood and adolescence it was like being stuck in the nightmare and not being able to get out but the nightmare was over but I couldn't wake up.* ***And trying desperately to get connected with the rest of the world and I taught myself -- the self-help books and all those other weird things that came out in the 60's and 70's. I taught myself how to relate with other people through books.*** *It would say do this and this and that. I would try and this doesn't work. So I would try something else –does it work, yes.* ***And at that point what I was working more with was fighting back from my withdrawal that I had put myself in after shock or whatever, and trying to find some normality..***

Walda's fight to deal with her withdrawal rested primarily with her own resourcefulness. A remarkable testimony to her own fortitude.

Nicola spoke of her desire to recover her lost memories. She stated:

> ***You know and real things that happened in my pre-adolescent and adolescent time [which] I need to go back and claim and work through and I never realized I had lost all of that.*** *So and that* ***implies grief.*** *I mean that implies mourning what I did lose. But it means you know having the joy too of being able to live it now and to reclaim it back. Now I have a chance. I might have lost it then but it's not lost forever.* ***I can go back now and get it. And I will. Because I don't just want to survive. .***

Finally, Nicola wanted to be "free of the feeling" that she "was a mistake". She stated:

> ***And I think to be free of that feeling of it was a mistake I was ever born.*** *You know the fear of you know will I go crazy if I you know get involved in this and that you know and the whole thing of needing to work really hard to earn other people's approval and it's okay.* ***I can just relax and be me.***

Finding the authentic self was the goal which Nicola had identified for herself. No doubt, this required working through the different messages she received as a child.

Despite the variability of each women's journey to transform and restructure different areas of their lives, they demonstrated several commonalties in the process of growth. These themes are presented below and are (a) commitment to the process of healing, (b) turning point - stopping the abuse, and (c) deriving meaning from the experience.

Commitment to the Process of Healing

These women demonstrated an outstanding commitment to heal the effects of the abuse. This was demonstrated as some of the women lived through the ordeal of intense emotional pain or as some of the women struggled with the choice to continue living. For other women the commitment to heal was reflected in a life long commitment to deal with the effects.

Diana demonstrated her commitment to heal in the following remarks:

> ***You have to go on. It has taken this long for me to remember it. I might as well at least heal instead of moping around about it.***

Diana decided to go on to heal as the alternative was to "mope". Her decision to heal was also based on her assessment of the length of time it took for her to remember the sexual abuse.

Una reflected on her former self defeating patterns as she talked about the "old Una". Her healing involved changing the self defeating pattern. She stated:

> *Change the whole thinking pattern because it always goes back to if I can just be like I was. I can just dwindle along just as before because it's like a security blanket just to go back and be like that again. Because that was not the old me.* ***It's like I can just be that***

> ***old Una. I don't have to face anything...I couldn't drive a car for a longest time because I kept thinking I can't do it.*** *I can't do it you know.*

She commented on the effort it takes to change. Her commitment to heal was associated with her decision to learn from the experience. She stated:

> *Something might wake you up. Something might not wake some people up though. Some people just go along forever being and doing the same things. They never learn from it.* ***And it does take a real conscious effort to say I'm going to change and I can learn from this experience or whatever experience you have in your life you know to learn from it.*** *Because that's what life is – a learning experience. That's all it is. So you know.*

Una 's commitment to change is exemplified by her daily choice to continue thinking in new ways. She stated:

> *But I – like I said* ***it takes each day of your life to turn it around and each day to set up your new way of thinking*** *and it takes re -- you have to rehash it every time you know.*

Part of Arla's healing appeared to be her commitment to see reality. Arla explained, her commitment to understand life for what it was helped her to uncover the truth.

> *And I suppose that it is also interesting for me in the sense that* ***my entire life has been devoted to knowing*** *and I feel that you know the strongest commitment that I have in my life* ***is a commitment to seeing reality for what it is and getting rid of illusion after illusion as it were.*** *I have a very strong commitment to reality.*

The amount of energy she has devoted to this knowing was extraordinary--the energy of her entire life. Arla's story is also a story of courage for she continued on her journey to see reality even after her parents rejected her confrontation. Arla described a life long journey orientated to the goal of healing.

Mina's commitment to survive and heal occurred after she survived a suicide attempt. She began her account by disclosing her planned intention to commit suicide 6 years ago. As Mina indicated, her plan went astray when she impulsively took a whole bottle of antihistamines. Mina stated:

> *And part of that change was I became increasing more suicidal and I had actually* ***planned on my birthday to go into the garage and turn on the car*** *and I said to myself that I had gotten– it was allergy season and I had ...a prescription for antihistamine* ***and just out of just no forethought or planning about taking one and I just took the whole bottle.*** *...And I had a you know a physiological response.* ***And then the next morning when I woke up*** *I felt really groggy and sick but I thought well, this was just -- I don't know why it did this but it did it and I* ***thought, well, if you know it can't be that bad if there is people and even a pet that I would miss.....So then I thought I need to make some changes in my life. I need to understand what's going on.***

Mina's wake up call is a dramatic account, but the account demonstrated how she was alerted to the need to understand what was happening to herself. Her commitment to healing was serendipitous.

Nicola talked about her choice to try and live life fully. She explained that she was reclaiming her lost memories.

> *I mean that implies mourning what I did lose. But it means you know having the joy too of being able to live it now and to reclaim it back. Now I have a chance. I might have lost it then but it's not lost forever. I can go back now and get it. And I will.* ***Because I don't just want to survive. I really want to live. I really want to live fully. I don't just want to survive this and sort of grope and grovel around. I really want to live.*** *Like really live....And I think to be free of that feeling of it was a mistake I was ever born.*

Despite her commitment to try and reclaim what had been lost, Nicola talked of the temptation to give up. She stated:

> *But the tough part through all of this does get tired at times and that's scary when the tough part -- it's like mental fatigue....you'd be tired like it's hard to go on.* ***And that's hard and then I think I can't give up now. I think I've survived all of that. I mean I don't want to toss in the towel now.***

Part of Nicola's impetus to heal occurred as she viewed what she already survived. To abort her journey would be to abandon her hope for the future.

Nadia's commitment to heal was demonstrated as she managed to continue on her journey despite the great amount of pain she endured. She stated:

> *Twice during those 8 months, no* ***twice during that year*** *...* ***I could have gladly taken my own life. The pain was so intense.***

In the following excerpt Nadia reflected on the anger and the role this played in her desire to live. She stated:

> ***I got angry. I would say, no way, I have come this far in finding out what it -- why I function the way I did all those years and I am going to have to see it through so a lot of it was anger.*** *I mean I haven't gone through this* ***hell*** *-- now to drop it and that has seen me through some devastating times.*

Notice how Nadia has labelled her emotional trauma as "hell". In the following excerpt Nadia gained hope as she thought of her grandchildren; she saw the future as offering untold possibilities for herself, her children, nieces and grandchildren.

> *I do not want to live this way the rest of my life. So no matter what happens I have got to see it through. I have got to see it through.* ***There was a real strong determination, I think not only just for myself, but also for my girls and my nieces, and for my grandsons.***

Nadia's commitment to heal gained momentum as she adopted an attitude of entitlement. She stated:

> *And besides I got to the point where I damn well deserve better.* ***Not only did all the others deserve better, I deserved better than what I had been dealt****. And if I was the only one that was going to have to go after it to get it then so be it.*

All of the women were clearly committed to the process of healing. There were many things which appeared to help women make the commitment. The alternative of not striving for healing provided an impetus for one women. Whereas, for another woman it was the memory of her former self defeating patterns which committed her to changing these patterns. Another women gained her commitment as she journeyed to uncover illusions. For many women, the hope of recovery provided motivation to continue the journey.

Turning Point- Stopping the Abuse

A turning point of trying to stop the abuse emerged as a theme from the data. This represents a decision point. For three of the women the decision to actively stop the abuse was made in their preadolescence or adolescence when they were living with the sexual abuse. While for three of the women the turning point occurred several years after the sexual abuse had ended and involved a commitment to stopping sexual abuse in successive generations or was an evaluation of how this ought not to occur in society. The essence of this theme was reflected by six women.

Una told her story of how she stopped her brother from sexually abusing her. She stated:

> *Now I kind of remember the finishing of it more so than when it began because I* ***remember being a teenager and thinking that this isn't normal*** *and to find a boyfriend of my own was the right thing to do to get rid of him – pestering me all the time.* ***So I kind of then went out at age 16 and found a boyfriend and then after that it stopped because I decided -- not -- I consciously decided this is***

> ***but when he would make the gestures I would then say you know, "Get lost," kind of thing. "No more this you know."***

What is clear is that Una said no to the abuse. Her no is more than just a word, as it represents a refusal to continue to be victimized. She followed her conscience, the voice which told her this is not right.

Arla's recalls her struggle to end the abuse. Her story is as follows:

> ***I must have been 11 or 12. Maybe 12 years old. My father actively tried to seduce me.*** *And of course I have a very clear memory of this incidence because I was old enough to remember. ...I was very sexually aroused and you know then all of a sudden it was like suddenly this sort of whole thought kind of sprung up you know.* ***This is wrong. What about my mother?*** *And of course* ***I ran away and I wouldn't allow him to continue with it and from that point on he was always approaching me.*** *He was always up first in the morning. He would never kiss me you know in a platonic way whenever he kissed me he would be trying to put his tongue in my mouth. He would expose himself to me. He was always trying to talk to me about sexual matters.* ***From the point when I was 12 when I really sort of took control and said, "No you can't do this. This is wrong,"*** *then in a certain sense I had control.* ***And that I felt that I was always pushing him away.***

Arla's concern for her mother appeared to be one of the motivating factors in her decision to stop the abuse. Since Arla's father kept on approaching her, stopping the abuse involved an incredible amount of persistence and strength.

Nadia stopped the sexual abuse by listening to her own feelings of terror and by ignoring the wishes of her aunts. Her account was as follows:

> ***The only thing was when I was about 14 and a half I remember one Sunday I was there -- it must have been during the holidays and I was asked by my two spinster aunts -- my grandmother had died in the***

> ***meantime -- to go for a walk with grandfather.*** *And for some reason I still cannot explain to this day I was terrified.* ***I was absolutely petrified that he would do something more than he had already done and I ran away.*** *Sunday afternoon I just took off for the woods myself and oh, I just can –just sitting now think about it. I can still feel the pounding of my heart. There was such incredible fear that I didn't dare stick around and go for that walk.* ***And after that I avoided all contact with him....***

Nadia displayed great courage as she followed her feelings, daring to disobey the orders she was given by the adults in her life.

Mina's turning point is different from the previous three women who stopped the abuse in their own lives. Mina came to a point where she evaluated abuse as being wrong. Her statement was like a plea for our society to change as a whole. She stated:

> *What happened to me is a product of our culture and from that thinking* ***our culture needs to change. Something has to change. You know people can't treat people this way. It is not right.***

Walda's turning point was her decision to stop intergenerational sexual abuse in her extended family. She stated:

> *And so when the cousin that I was platonically involved with and my brother and I talked about what was going on he basically said, "No this stops in this generation."* ***There is another cousin who had been assaulted by her father -- not a blood member of the family and in talking with her we all said, "No this stops in this generation."*** *So we are all very -- it's like dragging my whole family out of the closet in a way.*

Walda has seized the opportunity of the moment. She appeared to see the extent to which sexual abuse had touched the lives of her family and says "no" more. This a very powerful no, for in the instance it is uttered it holds the promise of a future where there is no more sexual abuse.

Helene hoped sexual abuse end on a global level. She stated:

> *It's – abuse happens because somewhere way back in time it began – you know like and it's been handed down. I – the other thing that I think is as long as the men continue to get abused the abuse will continue. I don't think the women involved – the ones that I know abuse but of course I do know that women abuse.* ***In the cases that I know I know that the women will not abuse in any way so that's my hope. The only hope is to get the men that have abused and try to get them healed. But that seems to be pretty hard to do.***

Helene formulated a genesis of sexual abuse from her experience, stating abuse started somewhere in the past, and continued with each generation as it was passed on. She hoped to see male perpetrators end sexual abuse. Evaluating the occurrence of sexual abuse in a global and historical context , Helene has moved beyond her own life to think of the continuity of human behavior. The harvest of our past plant the seeds of today to become the harvest of our future. Helene wishes to see a different harvest.

Stopping sexual abuse, whether it was an active attempt to stop the perpetrator or a vision of what could be, represented a distinct point in the lives of the women. As such the experience makes a resounding loud political statement which simply stated "no".

Meaning Derived from the Experience

The theme of deriving meaning from the experience of childhood sexual abuse emerged spontaneously from the stories of women. The meanings formulated were unique to each of the women.

Deriving a positive meaning from some of the consequences of childhood sexual abuse allowed Arla to view the experience as "enrich(ing) her moment". She stated:

> *And that process [healing process] I view as a very* ***positive process and in a certain sense I don't even regret it because I feel that I have been forced to understand life and human nature in a way that most people don't have***

> ***to.*** *But it's brought me a lot that process --* ***it has enriched my moment. It has enriched me as a human being.*** *So I don't regret that. I don't feel bitter about my past and when I first left home I certainly had a lot of rage towards my parents.*

Arla's understanding of life and of human nature was a direct result of her experience. Notice how Arla stated that the childhood sexual abuse has "forced" her to understand life in ways that others do not have too. This is an interesting perspective which speaks of the role her experience had in formulating meaning.

Mina derives meaning from the strength she had in surviving the abuse. Her survival is attributed to her resilience of spirit. She stated:

> ***How did I survive coming out of that sick family?*** *Like that was all around me or* ***whatever resilience of spirit was there that I have is phenomenal.***

Walda derived a positive meaning from talking out. She stated:

> ***But in revealing because I can talk about it, it gives them the strength to talk about it and they can start looking at what is really happening in their life.*** *So I think that's positive.*

Walda hoped that the telling of her own story would encourage or allow other women to tell their stories. This is an incredible way for silenced women to gain the courage to disclose their experiences of childhood sexual abuse.

Nicola offered a statement which was the beginning point of her orientation towards finding meaning. She stated:

> *And now it's that you know I know there's the why and yet I can dwell on the why you know so much like why me that it takes my focus and my energy away from why me. I will never know. I will never know that and yet I can dwell on that so much that it can impede me from making something good out of it or saying, well it was me.* ***It did happen and so let's not dwell on the why but get on with making something out of it.*** *Because some of those things just don't have answers.*

As Nicola indicated she was ready to move on to create "something out of" the experience. This points to the creativity which is required in finding meaning. It is a creative act which transforms the lived experience of the person. Nicola further commented that she was able to survive throughout the abuse, which seemed to give her a sense of meaning. In the following quote she stated:

> *At least I was able to survive. I mean I didn't become a statistic.* ***You know like in so many several countries where people have nine kids and six died before age 5. At least I didn't die through it.***

Helene's meaning was derived from recognizing the influence her experience had in the formation of character.

> *It happened and I am still the strong person. I'm still a good person. I had still contributed much, and I am what I am because it happened to me and I would have never thought I could have said that.* ***My unusual character. My carriage, everything now is because I wanted to survive because I really should have died.***

There was no doubt that Helene has created a positive meaning for herself. Her meaning came from recognizing the strength she had in surviving the sexual abuse.

Nadia's sense of meaning was derived from her willingness to talk about her experience of childhood sexual abuse. She stated:

> ***I can now say I do not feel picked on anymore, but rather picked for you know. To talk to people and just be vulnerable without fear of rejection.*** *That takes practice....There is always that bit of fear that what you are going to say is going to turn people off, but I have to say it for those people who wished they had somebody to talk to like I did years ago.* ***Somebody is not going to call them weird or oh, you should have forgiven that long ago because if you had been forgiven it would have been over so therefore you are not even a good Christian.*** *I heard about all the garbage you can hear and I am not the only one.*

Nadia's resolution to talk about her sexual abuse appeared to be motivated by the inept responses she received when she first disclosed her experience of sexual abuse. Being an agent of social change she was speaking out so that others could speak more easily.

Nadia also appeared to derive meaning in the hope that she had for her children and grandchildren; she hoped that they would be able to gain healthy interpersonal skills. She stated:

> *Which is why we have said -- I have said to my husband about 2 weeks ago -- I said, ...**I will be so thankful if I can be just the person in transition in our family where my kids can see the changes and work on their own and then carry it on with their kids. If I can be that, none of this has been for nothing.**"*

The meanings which were derived from the experience of childhood sexual abuse were all positive and varied among the women. Some of the meanings allowed women to reach out to others. By speaking out, these women were exposing the secrets which some people did not want to hear ; helping to break the pattern of secrecy. For other women the meanings provided positive affirmations about their character or abilities to understand others. Deriving meaning from the experience appeared to be a very important aspect of surviving the experience of sexual abuse.

Moving On

Moving on (recognizing the abuse and moving beyond it) emerged as a theme in the lives of the women who were sexually abused. Sometimes moving on meant that women were changing their self concepts, whereas, for others it represented the decision to go forward with their lives. Some of the women experienced the distinct feeling that they integrated the experience, without allowing it to define who they were.

Diana demonstrated the theme of moving on in the following excerpt. She explained that if she had known about the sexual abuse before it occurred, she would have done something to prevent it. Even though Diana expressed regret, it was evident that she made a decision not to dwell on the past. She stated:

> *Well I mean if I could go back knowing what I know now, which is never going to happen I am sure I probably would have stuck to my mom like glue or done something else.* ***But you can't. You have to go on.***

Notice how Diana made a decision to go forward. It is as if she stated, I know this happened and I regret that it has happened, but I am going move beyond this.

Similarly, Una talked about her conscious decision to face her problems and move on.

> *I had a couple of bad boyfriends – that type of thing. I got into a bad situation at about age 17 and that just kind of worked me up. And I said no more. I am not going --* ***I am going to face up to things and you know get it all out in the open and shift it and just move on and try to become the person I am and have a new life and that's what I've done.***

Notice how Una used the word "become" in the phrase "...try to become the person I am and have a new life...". She decided to define herself and not have the abuse define her. As well, she recognized that moving on is a process, not an event.

The theme of moving on was also evident as Arla talked about how she no longer saw the childhood sexual abuse as her own problem. She stated:

> ***And really it was a long long time before I could ever see the whole thing in perspective of a family dynamic and not in perspective of you know that this was my problem.*** *And I think really that was a* ***very liberating thing for me*** *because to have to focus on yourself in such a negative way and I think even in my adult years I focused on myself in that negative way. It's like this is my problem. This struggle with my sexual orientation and my sexuality – this is my problem. It was a long time before I really saw it as part of a whole dynamic,* ***as something that had been***

> ***handed down to me as it were through social interactions with my parents and through their social interactions with each other....***

Arla's sense of "liberation" accompanied a new definition of herself; she moved on to see herself in the context of her family.

Arla's sense of having integrated the experience is further reflected in how she evaluated her parents.

> ***I can't see them as evil people even though I cannot say I love them as parents.*** *I have profound compassion for them and you know for what they were going through when all this was happening.* ***So that has changed.*** *That's changed. And I think as a result I have more compassion for myself too you know over the years....I* ***think I have gotten stronger and stronger progressively in being able to work at it and being able to see it in a real way.***

Arla has moved on to view her parents in a compassionate way. In fact, moving on represented not only new ways to view her parents, but also represented new ways to define herself and the sexual abuse.

In the following excerpt Mina stated that her "sense of self (was) in flux".

> ***It's sense of self. And that's in flux right now*** *-- it's really. I know that I am really confused and frustrated and angry and mad and -- I just don't agree with a lot of what I see going on around me and I feel hopeless, helpless and happyless and somewhat powerless to make it any difference. I am thinking how can I make it -- even though I want to that desire is there, like I mean I have been through something and I've found how I've coped and kept going on ...*

Mina further stated:

> ***I guess the only other thing I can really do is to try to become the best person I can and do what I can for myself*** *and release myself from any responsibility for it.*

Mina wished to become the best person that she could. It is obvious that she has made the choice to move on.

Stephania's movement has centered around gaining an understanding of the context which surrounded the sexual abuse she experienced. She stated:

> ***I'm being able now to put that away and see where those voices came from and give it back to those people*** *and now that I* ***feel like my head is kind of above water now*** *and I'm not drowning in all of this stuff so much.* ***I'm starting to be able to get a sense of the bigger picture in my family*** *and what was happening in my family and just in my life that allowed all of this to happen or contributed to the whole situation.*

Nadia was able to move on to accept her sexuality. She stated:

> *Hey, I feel like* ***I can finally accept the fact that I am a woman****. And that it is okay for my husband to look at me.*

The theme of moving on demonstrated the unique ways in which women were seeking to restructure their relationships, to change their self concepts, to accept their sexuality, and to gain the context for the sexual abuse. Each piece of work demonstrates their willingness to proceed forward.

In summary, the experience of being a survivor initially involved gaining an awareness of the past sexual abuse. Logically this makes sense as how can women take on the experience if conscious awareness of sexual abuse is absent. As was demonstrated, women gained this awareness through labelling, intuitive knowing, and remembering. Gaining awareness was often accompanied by disbelief and as a consequence women had to accept the sexual abuse as a reality.

Making connections between behaviors and feelings helped women to explain their lives. It acted to provide a reference point for the origin of the feelings or behaviors. Working through is an important aspect of being a survivor and represents a transition point for the women–a point in their lives where they were ready to tackle another aspect of their healing, or the actual healing work they were doing. Working through included the themes of being committed to the process of healing, turning point - stopping the abuse and finding personal meaning. Each of the women demonstrated remarkable commitment to the process of healing. Often there was an aspect of hope in women's commitment as there was in the turning point of stopping the abuse. Many women were able to stop the abuse in their own lives, while for other women they hoped abuse in future generations or in society would come to an end. Positive meanings emerged from the experience of being a survivor, providing testimony of the strength women had in surviving the abuse. Finally, moving on represented how women were able to move beyond the previous effects of the abuse to redefine themselves.

B. The Experience of Being Victimized

The experience of being victimized is described by three major themes. These are losses, objectification and devaluation, and negative effects. The following section presents the three themes: first, losses are described, followed by objectification and devaluation, and finally negative effects are described.

Losses

Women commonly described feeling despair, depression and anger over lost opportunities or lost potential in relationships and themselves. Losses such as lost educational opportunities, lost childhood, a lost chance to develop one's own identity without the destructiveness of incest, lost potential and the loss of a normal sexual relationship were described by women.

Una clearly named the anger she felt in relation to not having obtained the education she desired. In the following excerpt she also addressed the issue of lost time.

> *That's what makes me mad. How society views you through your education. What education level you are at and of course* ***my education was messed up so now I'm like having to start again at this age****.* ***And think you know I wish I could***

> ***turn the clocks back for that reason so that I could be farther ahead of the game now.***

When age norms are not on target in our life trajectory, an individual is aware of the breech of time, as Una was.

Arla talked of the loss she experienced in relation to her personality. Note how she referred to incest in the following excerpt as having produced a psychological handicap.

> *I sometimes think how I would have been better off had I been an orphan. It's like as an orphan I would have started at zero but* ***with the kind of situation that I grew up in I was at minus before I even started****. That's how I feel about it in terms of my parents. With minus what I mean is there is a psychic destruction going on in there....to me it's* ***[incest is] a psychological handicap*** *which is just as serious and just as devastating. It's like before you really even have a chance to evolve a personality someone else has put a claim on it.*

In the development of her personality, Arla cited parental influence as causing a psychic destruction. Typically, childhood is the time in which one "evolves a personality" achieving a sense of trust, autonomy, industry and identity. Missing the opportunity to progress along the normative path of psychological development was, as Arla noted, devastating. While, Arla was aware of the handicap she acquired, she did not mention what effect this had on her childhood. It was obvious that Arla suffered the loss of a normal childhood.

Similarly, Walda noted how devastating the sexual abuse was for her. Notice that she referred to herself as having been destroyed.

> *In my childhood especially I don't think I know* ***what I missed*** *because it was so early and continued for the 4 years basically and then by the time he (foster uncle) left* ***I was destroyed****.*

Her loss was the loss of what other children normally experienced, a childhood. However, Walda stated, that she did not even know what was missed. Her experience precluded the normative experiences as the sexual abuse occurred when she was very young.

Walda also described the loss of not having friendships with other children when she was a child. She stated:

> ***I couldn't have a friendship with other kids*** *because I was always afraid that they would find out that I was somehow damaged or broken or something. And actually more like tarnished damaged goods.*

Walda's negative self evaluation prevented her from having friendships. No doubt, Walda must have sensed the social stigma which was associated with childhood sexual abuse. In the past, women were evaluated in terms of their virginity, as a commodity whose value was judged accordingly (Rush, 1980). Walda may have taken on the prevailing social norms of the times.

Stephania also described the loss of a childhood. She was able to remember an incident where she experienced the loss of herself as a carefree little girl.

> ***....but I clearly remember the sun going out that day and feeling like the world had ended, but I walked into this house a carefree little girl and that's not how I left.***

That day was when Stephania was sexually abused by her uncle's friend. At the time Stephania was only 3 or 4 years of age.

Mina's anger and frustration was felt in regards to her sense that she would not achieve her full potential. In the following excerpt she stated:

> *I am going and trying to do things that young adults and teenagers do and what I* – my greatest source of frustration and anger now is ***so much has been lost. I will never realize my full potential.*** *That has been denied me. And* ***it's not possible to catch up.***

As Mina indicated there was not just one loss, but there were many losses. Mina was able to name this as her full potential. Apparently, she felt that she was less than what she could have been.

Helene talked of her lost potential in a specific way, focusing on what could have been, or what she could have contributed to the world. She recognized that her positive attributes could have been an asset to the world.

> *Now I can actually look back now and I can say – I* ***used to just despair you know and I would go into these black depressions*** *and I'd say just think what I could have been given my looks, my intelligence, my strength, courage and everything else. Given that just think what I could have done, what I could have contributed to the world, what kind of a person.* ***I mean I couldn't even -- I didn't even finish school because I used to be too depressed....And I think if I could have gone to University and gone through as a child like normal people do, what I could have done with my life, what I could have contributed to the world and instead all I did is spend 15-20 years in constant depression*** *and running and running and getting nowhere.*

Helene described her mourning as "black depressions"; a vivid description of the depth to which she felt the loss. The promise of what could have been was broken for Helene.

Nadia's loss was the loss of a normal sexual relationship with her husband. The following excerpt described her loss.

> ***Because I think basically both my husband and I have been thoroughly cheated out of a normal relationship because of it*** *[incest].*

Nadia felt "cheated". This seemed to imply that someone had stolen her sexuality.

Una indicated her loss was the self confidence which she never had. She stated:

> *I know for a fact that this – I would say without a doubt that* ***abuse of any kind does set you on the wrong road because you lose something in your mind. You***

> ***just feel inadequate you know and you don't believe in yourself and you do go on this road of destruction*** *-- self-destruction not really knowing it though.*

As Una stated, feelings of inadequacy set her on a road of self-destruction.

Many of the women were able to name the losses they felt, losses felt in the context of time and of untold possibilities. A sense of permanence was embedded in the loss, in that they believed there was no way to recapture lost time or delays in obtaining what should of been achieved much earlier. Intense emotions were attached to the losses.

My own view is that developmental tasks can be mastered at later times. Development does not magically stop after the age of 18. However, lost opportunities of the past can not be regained.

Objectification and Devaluation

Objectification and devaluation emerged as a central theme when women described the experience of being sexually abused. Objectification is essentially being treated as an object. It also refers to how perpetrators ignored survivors' feelings and needs. In addition, this theme refers to the degradation and devaluation that women felt as children and females in the situation.

Stephania described an experience where she felt like she was treated like an object. The incident involved being sexually assaulted by her uncle's friend in the basement underneath the stairs. Suddenly, someone came down the stairs and she was left lying on a pile of laundry.

> *He took all of my clothes off and put his head between my legs and performed oral sex on me and got me to have oral sex with him and he laid on top of me and tried to rape me and didn't and at one point during that whole incident someone had come down the stairs....We were like underneath the stairs and behind the water tank and nobody could see us and this man just put his hand over my mouth and I was just terrified. I didn't say anything and this person came down and went back upstairs and I was stuck there.* ***So I remember just being left on a pile of laundry on the floor in the basement.***

Stephania also described how her uncle regarded her during the sexual abuse. She commented:

> ***I have lots of memories of him [her uncle] up in the attic and being raped and just treating us as though we were just a little object.*** *He often would pull out porn magazines when he was molesting me and he often performed oral sex on me and just did really gross things like shoving beer bottles inside of me -- and he loved to take his thumbs and squeeze my nipples which I didn't have breasts -- I mean I was 6 years old, and just squeeze the shit out of my chest and just gave him some sort of hoondish pleasure.* ***But -- so you name it. He did it to me too.***

Stephania's uncle had no regard for the feelings of a small child. As was indicated in the passage, Stephania remembered her uncle was only interested in his own pleasure. Similarly, Nadia noted that her perpetrator was only interested in her body.

> *He was interested in more than just me,* ***it was my body and the funny thing that now I think back -- it got to the point that's all he turned out to be interested in.***

The sense of being a slave was described by Arla. She also explained that she existed to satisfy the needs of her parents.

> *I think you know and I look at it now I* ***see my parents really to a very large degree they owned me*** *and* ***I was kind of a slave in a physical sense and an emotional sense*** *and I think that the only thing that I felt that I had that was really mine was my mind because they weren't interested in that....My parents weren't interested in me.* ***They only -- you know I was an extension of them. I was an object to satisfy their needs so in that sense why me is an interesting question. They didn't allow for me to exist....They didn't know me. They really didn't care about me you know in that sense.***

Mina, too, described herself as a slave when she was growing up, explaining she was allowed no boundaries.

> *You know I remember growing up being triangulated, enmeshed, having no boundaries. When the boundaries were violated and you know I would always say, "**Call me Kunte Kinte," because I'm a slave. I was a slave to my family.***

Another aspect of Arla's objectification was being a deprived of her own needs. She explained that even as an infant, she did not have the chance to experience a sense of control as her parents did not serve her needs.

> *And it's very bizarre but one day I had the strange understanding that when you look at babies -- **little infants -- they totally control their environment because parents have to serve the needs of that little child and I think that's what my father didn't ever have and it certainly is what I never had.***

Arla's needs were engulfed in the needs of her parents. Insightfully, Arla noted that her father never had his needs gratified as an infant.

Having one's rights taken away was another aspect of objectification. Una commented on this in the following quote:

> *Not really knowing why and I kept thinking **family is supposed to be your haven you know and they have taken advantage of you.** You know they're abusing you. You know and that's the mixed message you were getting. **Like they love you on the one hand and on the other hand they take away your rights....I don't think they've [Una's parents] ever seen any of us as individual people like our own feelings and thoughts you know.***

Not being an individual meant that Una was not allowed to have her own thoughts or feelings. In addition, being a nonentity implied deference to the views and feelings of the others.

Arla also spoke to the issue of the experience of having no rights and described the anger she felt in relation this.

> *...I remember as a child* ***feeling very angry about the fact that children have no rights....***

Another aspect of being objectified experienced by Mina was not being allowed to express herself. Mina commented on this issue as follows:

> ***I was never allowed to express myself****. Never allowed to speak and even when people would ask me question, my siblings would answer for me, so I had no voice.*

To have a voice a child must be given the opportunity to speak. This should be a right that is given to children, yet as Mina indicated the right to speak was taken away from her.

Objectification also referred to the experience of being devalued on the basis of gender. Helene talked about the gendered role she assumed in her family of origin. She stated:

> ***But you had to look after them because men are the chosen ones. Women are just the vessels to assist them*** *but it's -- so there was a contradictory message coming from her [Helene's mother]. She was the strong woman who controlled everybody and everything believing that the men were the chosen ones and she was just there to look after them and that's what we had to do.* ***And I believed I had to look after the men. And if it meant sex I suppose I had to comply.*** *So there was that angle to it too.*

Helene's view of her gender role was one of subservience to men; her needs were not considered to be important. Evidently, Helene was aware of the influence that socialization had regarding the imposition of that role on her; she identified that her mother enacted the same gender role. To impose a role which does not allow the expression of one's needs, is a form of objectification.

In the following quotation Helene described how her existence was based on satisfying the needs of men. Her needs simply did not matter.

> ***I was only there to look after them*** *[men].* ***There was no other reason for my existence.*** *It was* ***to make them feel good****. That didn't matter about me.*

Another aspect of the theme of objectification was the second class status that was associated with being a female. Nicola was aware of how her father (the perpetrator) viewed women.

> *Sons and stuff are always really important to my dad because they are the name bearers and all that so my brother can do no wrong.* ***But you know women are sort of very much second class for him.***

To exist as an object was a painful experience. It consisted of being stripped of feelings, of not having the opportunity to express the self, of serving the needs of others without the hope of reciprocity, and of being regarded only as a body which gave pleasure to others. Objectification also involved the devaluation of women within a prescribed gender role. For the women in this study, this meant existing as a reduced being, as less valuable than men, or as faceless entities.

Negative Effects of the Abuse

Another prominent theme which emerged from the data were the effects resulting directly from the abuse. Spontaneously disclosing these effects through their stories, women identified the following symptoms: (a) emotional reactions which included depression, (b) self depreciation and self-hatred, (c) self-blame, (d) memory loss which refers to repression, (e)dissociation and multiple personalities, (f) interpersonal difficulties, (g) compulsive/addictive behaviors, (h) body issues, (i) difficulties with sexual relationships, and (j) powerlessness.

Emotional Reactions

As a consequence of being victimized several women felt intense emotions. Emotions which were associated with the abuse were as follows: (a) anger, (b) fear, and (c) depression.

Rage was experienced by Arla. In the following quotation, Arla described the intense amount of rage she felt. She stated "*I **had tremendous rage**. I was so angry*". It is not hard to understand why Arla felt rage given what has occurred to her.

In the following excerpt, Nadia's experience with anger is described. Nadia was watching a television show which discussed the topic of childhood sexual abuse. As she was watching the show she started to experience an intense amount of anger which felt as if it were coming out of her little toes.

> ***I have never been angry about this before. But that time my chair was shaking. I was in a total state of rage....*** *I was screaming, "Dirty bastard. Why the hell did you do this to me?" Oh the angry seemed* ***like it came out of my little toes.***

Mina also experienced anger. Her anger was turned inwards and was expressed through self mutilation.

> *And the* ***anger is that I have*** *at other people I would always* ***turn it around on myself in one way or another.*** *And one time* ***I used to get like these little razors and nick my cuticles*** *and make them bleed and that was a form of expressing anger.*

In her adult life, Mina described herself as experiencing a daily fear of being raped. She stated:

> ***And I've always -- I walk around every day with a fear of rape. You know I hate being alone with men.***

Mina's fear is understandable once it is placed in to a context of being violated numerous times by a multiple number of perpetrators.

Emotional reactions such as anger and fear were intensely experienced. Women who experienced the intense negative emotions, not only had to deal with the intensity of the emotions. Further, because they had to overcome the norms which dictate that women should not express or feel anger, anger was often held in and transformed into depression, or acted out on the self, as in mutilation.

For seven of the nine women, depression was a common and debilitating outcome of the experience of being victimized. Yet, as was indicated by the following quotes, each of the women experienced depression in different ways.

Diana described herself as having experienced depression since she was in grade 9.

> *But I -- all throughout high-school* ***since grade 9 I was always constantly depressed and sad*** *and -- but I just didn't know why.*

Similarly, Mina described her experience of depression. While Mina was depressed, she cried and isolated herself from other people.

> ***Oh I was depressed all the time. I cried a lot. A lot of it was just being alone. I was removing myself from people....I felt worthless, hopeless, useless, and sometimes I just didn't want to get out of bed in the morning.***

Mina experienced depression and hopelessness in the extreme, such that by age 5 she had suicidal thoughts.

> ***So I was suicidal when I was 5.*** *I had already* ***decided that life was not worth living....All through childhood especially adolescence*** *and always -- I mean* ***I've always entertained suicide*** *even as an adolescent....****I always fantasized about killing myself....***

Mina associated her depression with internalized anger.

> ***I always kept it [anger] inward,*** *and I've always been very depressed.* ***I could have probably been diagnosed as clinically depressed at 5, 4 or 5 years of age.***

Walda described her chronic experience with depression.

> ***I can remember from then on [since childhood] feeling depressed.*** *Just made the connection during this last month and that is why* ***I always had a problem with depression.***

Helene mentioned that she struggled with depression for 20 years and as a consequence was not able to finish school. She stated:

> *What I did was I* ***had been in going to psychiatrists for nearly 20 years for a deep depression and I couldn't succeed in anything because of the depression...I used to just despair you know and I would go into these black depressions*** *....I mean I couldn't even --* ***I didn't even finish school because I used to be too depressed.***

To struggle with depression for 20 years was to experience a significant reduction in the quality of life.

Stephania admitted to experiencing depression in the context of self-blame.

> ***Just a lot of depression and self needing*** *and* ***it's even hard to go back to that space now, but if it was my fault, and at least it would all make sense,*** *and that there must have been something wrong with me if all of this stuff happened to me.*

Nadia's depression occurred as she discovered the extent to which sexual abuse had touched the different generations in her family.

> ***Now it is October and I am in depression*** *because I'm just -- I mean I am sitting around the house and* ***I am doing the very basics*** *instead of taking a break from running my home -- taking a 5 minute rest, a reading break, a music break, a bible break -- whatever.* ***I am taking a break from the depression to do the work that I have to do.***

As Nadia indicated in her account, her energy became depleted and she found it difficult to complete her housework.

Nicola described how she became suicidal at one point in her recovery. According to Nicola, her suicidal thoughts seemed to originate from the little girl who felt there was no way out from the abuse she experienced.

> ***I became really suicidal at that point*** *and ... I had a colleague who I knew fairly well who committed suicide about a year ago .....And I thought I could never do that you know to my kids ...and* ***yet it got so dark at times that it didn't seem like there was any other way out. I realize now that a lot of that probably came from the little girl ....***

Nicola described how her original feeling of depression was compounded when she started to feel guilty about being suicidal. She essentially became depressed about being depressed.

> ***I think you know feeling guilty about feeling suicidal. You know I blame myself....And so I really start getting down on myself for even thinking those thoughts*** *instead of acknowledging that gee, this is largely coming from you know the way the little girl felt back then.*

For many of the women, the experience of being depressed was a chronic condition, going on almost endlessly in time. Indeed this was a painful state to experience as feelings of joy, pride and pleasure were absent.

Self Depreciation and Self-Hatred

Self depreciation was often felt as a sense of being flawed, as a feeling of being dirty, and as a perception of being unworthy. Some women acknowledged self-hatred in addition to self depreciation. No matter how this was experienced, it was evident that self depreciation and self-hatred robbed women of vitality.

Overall, Mina felt that there was something wrong with herself. Her sense of being flawed originated from the abusive experiences. She stated:

> *But maybe at that time not being able to differentiate the different areas that were involved. Like it just seemed – it was because of this feeling of isolation and emotional devastation was all encompassing.* ***And it was that those feelings came out of each experience so since I was feeling the same it had to be something wrong with me****.*

Similarly, both Helene and Stephania also felt that they were flawed in some manner. Helene stated:

> ***..There was something wrong with me.***

Stephania stated:

> ***So essentially that there was just something fundamentally wrong with me if all of this stuff would have happened.***

Helene also evaluated herself in a negative manner, describing herself as useless and wasted.

> *I didn't deserve anything that I wanted....****I was useless and wasted.*** *I didn't deserve anything.*

Self hatred was also a part of self depreciation experienced by Helene.

> ***Oh I hated myself. Just a stupid weak person you know for letting it happen so that's basically how...****The hating myself.*

Mina acknowledged the experience of hating herself. She stated:

> ***Oh I was just hating myself.****"*

Diana labeled herself in a negative manner, describing herself as a cold bitch.

> *I am a very* ***cold person****. I feel a* ***bitch.***

Arla described how she felt marked as a result of the sexual abuse. She wondered if the feeling would ever go away.

> *I don't know if you ever totally get rid of that kind of feeling. It's* ***like feeling marked you know.***

Walda demonstrated the theme self depreciation as she referred to herself as damaged goods.

> *I was somehow* ***damaged or broken*** *or something. And actually more* ***like tarnished damaged goods****.*

Nadia recalled how she felt dirty and violated as a teenager during the period when she was being sexually abused by her grandfather. She was able to observe how her evaluation of herself affected the way she interacted with her classmates.

> *One was* ***feeling dirty and violated*** *and certainly I could see my lack of self-esteem all through my teenage years as a result of that. I remember a grade 6 picture where my classmates just really let me have it because I looked like this in the picture.* ***I looked down****. Very,* ***very uncertain****. Very subdued.*

After Nadia's daughter disclosed to her (Nadia's own son sexually abused her daughter), Nadia experienced a sense of being dirty. Once again as an adult, her sense of being dirty affected her relatedness to the rest of the world and she built a wall around herself.

> *I have never been touched by dirt. I have* ***been produced by dirt and I in turn have produced dirt****. And the* ***first thing I did was build a wall around myself***

Nadia also felt unworthy.

> ***....I felt so grossly worthless***

Mina struggled to accept herself as a worthy person. This was in the context of asking for or accepting help.

> *That's something that's very important to me and so* ***I have a hard time*** *asking for help and accepting help or* ***to even think I am worthy****.*

Nicola indicated that as her memories returned the little girl labelled herself as bad.

> *I think when the memories came back it was very much the little girl kept saying you know* ***I'm bad, I'm ugly and dirty*** *and it just came with the memory and that it wasn't that I thought about it.*

Nicola tried to compensate for her sense of being bad by trying very hard to be a good student and daughter.

> ***And I think just realizing I can never be good enough. Just lacking something in myself*** *that I tried hard at school and I got straight A's and I was good at sports and all of this stuff and yet I* ***tried really hard not to make trouble in the family like not to fight with my brother, to please to my mom, to sort of be everything she wanted me to*** *be and that kind of thing and to really be good like really be good.*

As Summit (1983) noted, children who have been sexually abused, often take on negative self statements as a way of surviving. If sexually abused children were to view their betrayal by adults realistically, children would be emotionally devastated, to the point where their survival might be jeopardized. Developmentally, children need adults to meet their needs; sexually abused children who believe they are bad are merely preserving their relationship of dependency to the adults in their lives. No doubt, the women who engaged in self depreciation were merely trying survive the sexual abuse.

Self-Blame

Self-blame was an effect which seven of the nine women described at some point in their lives. Self-blame was associated with what was perceived to be a flawed self, a failure to stop or leave the abuse, and even valued aspects of oneself. In the following quotation, Nadia, talked in the past tense, indicating that she no longer experienced self-blame. Nadia stated in the following excerpt:

> *One of the things that* ***people like myself who have been through this type of abuse have felt that they were to blame.***

Blaming the self for sexual abuse provided an explanation as to why the sexual abuse occurred. The association of maladjustment to self-blame has been documented (Dyck et al. 1991; Gold, 1986; Hoagwood, 1990; Morrow, 1991). Even though Nadia does not indicate the association of self-blame to how she felt, I can only assume that relinquishing self-blame was a life affirming act.

Stephania blamed herself by labeling herself as a "slut". She stated:

> *I would rather think sometimes -- well, especially earlier on,* ***that I was just the best 7 year old little slut ever going on in the world*** *and I must have seduced all these men because how would they all be doing these things to me.*

Labelling herself as a "slut" provided an explanation to the question of why the sexual abuse occurred. It was a way of taking on the responsibility for the abuse. Stephania labelled herself a "slut" as this was her way of making sense of the world, of surviving the horror of such brutality, and of maintaining her ties to the adults in her life. How could she of maintained any ties with the adults in her life if she were to attribute the responsibility to the adults who were her perpetrators?

Mina had the idea that she was a slut when she was 8 years old.

> *I was 8 years old and* ***I sort of had the idea that I was a slut****, and I suspect that when I was little, even younger, I suspect when my brother babysat me that he was fondling me as well.*

Mina's self-blame was also described in a more general manner. Mina felt that there was something wrong with herself.

> ***I always felt there was something wrong with me*** *like more like what's wrong with -- a lot of it was probably to a greater degree what's wrong with me rather than why me, but they might be the same thing.* ***I blamed myself.***

Mina, also wondered whether she was genetically impaired or if her defectiveness was a result of her birth. Mina talked about her sense of being flawed in the following quotation:

> ***One of it was genetic****. Like you know when I was born I was a sickly baby. The umbilical chord was wrapped around my neck and* ***wondering did that make me slow****?* ***Was I mentally retarded****?...and often wondering if you know oxygen had been cut off to my brain and* ***was I mentally impaired....***

According to Mina, she also thought that men were able to sense her badness through some sort of beacon.

> ***...or genetic factor that you know that had a beacon of*** *-- you know* ***men could sense that she's a bad little girl*** *and you can* ***do this to her because she's a bad little girl****....That's what I used to think that there was -- that* ***I give off a smell or something****...*

Another aspect of self-blame involved blaming themselves for not stopping the sexual abuse. Una stated that she blamed herself because she recognized that the abuse was wrong and failed to stop it when she was a child.

> ***I would blame myself because I'd say why didn't I have it in my mind to say this is wrong and stop it*** *because I think when you're a child you don't know you have that ability sometimes.*

Similarly, Nicola blamed herself as she thought she could have stopped the abuse.

> ***But as a child I think I very much felt that I just didn't have it in me to be good enough because if I was I could have made it stop.***

Helene blamed herself for not warding off the sexual abuse; her sister was able to ward off the sexual advances of her brother while she was not. She stated:

> *She (Helene's sister) said, "Yes. He tried. He tried to abuse me and I* ***kicked him in the balls*** *and I* ***hit him with a log of wood so he didn't abuse me.****" And I said, "Well, oh." So she said, "So* ***if he abused you that's your problem.*** *You should*

> *have looked after yourself like I did."....* ***So I thought there was something wrong with me that I was you know not bold and brave*** *enough and you know that there was something wrong with me that* ***if a little girl [her sister] like her*** *– she's a lot younger than me.* ***If she could have looked after herself so well why couldn't I****?*

Stephania blamed herself for not removing herself from an abusive situation with her brother. She stated:

> *I think different times throughout my therapy when I've had different memories especially* ***when I'd been older I've asked myself, well why didn't I just get up and go especially with my brother when it wasn't very violent.***

Nadia expressed her self-blame as shame for not walking away from the abuse. She stated:

> *And then we came to the meeting and one of the girls started talking about how she realized shame in a specific area, and* ***all of a sudden I was back at that bloody shed and I was so ashamed of the fact that I never walked away****.*

Commonly women blamed themselves for going along with the abusers or for associating with the abusers. The women may have seen this as a form of cooperation. As Una explained, self-blame was related to the fact that she went along with the abuse knowing ahead of time that it was going to happen. She stated:

> *I'm kind of saying* ***I felt responsible when I knew it was always happening and*** *then I felt responsible because I thought well I know it's going to happen* ***and I'm going to go ahead with it you know.*** *So it was kind of* ***premeditated in a way****.*

Helene blamed herself for associating with her brother and for following her brother. She stated:

> *So my brother – I had to forget I was pretty but I was also always around, as I say with the boys.* ***I was always there so therefore I was asking for it. I never left my***

> ***brother alone. I followed him everywhere*** *and he used to get angry you know because I followed him everywhere.*

Two women blamed the abuse on their physical beauty. For example, Helene blamed herself for being above average in looks, intelligence and goodness. She stated:

> *But so I believed that* ***that happened to me then because I was so good*** *and so – and I was such a* ***good little religious girl*** *and everything* ***and*** *I was* ***pretty*** *and religious and I was good and everything* ***and intelligent*** *so they had to get me.*

Arla also blamed the sexual abuse on her beauty.

> ***That I was a beautiful child and that's why this happened to me****, and ....****I couldn't stay beautiful****....And I'm sure that all relates back to my early relationship with my father....*

The women expressed many reasons for blaming the self. Self-blame did not make any sense, for women blamed both what they thought were flawed aspects of themselves and even valued aspects such as beauty. By far, most of the women concentrated their blame on to aspects of the abuse which concentrated on their failure to end the abuse. In addition, it is notable that each of the women had several reasons for why they blamed themselves. There was not just one reason for blaming the self. Nor did self-blame express itself in just one direction; as one woman experienced self-blame for what she thought was a flawed self and for being beautiful. Self-blame, was the self attempting to cope with and explain what was a very degrading act. Given the knowledge, relationship of the perpetrators to the women, and their developmental stages when they were first abused, self-blame represented a way of making sense of something for which no gave them an explanation.

Memory Loss

Another effect of being victimized was loss of memories. Many of the women repressed memories of their experiences in childhood and some of the women continued to repress these experiences in their adult lives. Stephania explained she repressed her memories until just a year and a half ago.

> *It's been a year and a half since I've remembered all this stuff.* ***I had repressed it all until just before my ...birthday***

Nicola experienced memory loss for most of her life, her memories returned to her only in the recent past. Notice how Nicola was surprised by the memories, as she formerly thought she "was a regular kid".

> *I mean* ***I just thought I was a regular kid.*** *And then ...in September,* ***my memory just started coming back****. And it was a like a door and my mind was being pushed open and I had that sensation for a little while before I started to remember.*

For Diana, repression was employed until she was in junior high school. As she indicated, she did not have any idea that she was sexually abused prior to this.

> *Well now I actually realize that it had happened even though it is still hard for me to believe,* ***but looking back and before I had no clue of what had happened for those years****. And even* ***in [junior high school] when this popped out I*** *couldn't believe it. I thought, wait a minute, why am I saying this?*

For the preceding women, Stephania, Nicola and Diana, it was evident that they all used repression for a period of time in their lives. As was indicated, the returning memory was experienced as a surprise for the women. However, as the next three women have indicated, repression may selectively remain intact for some events even after the women had recalled various aspects of the sexual abuse. For example, Mina was unable to remember when she first had sexual intercourse.

> *And I had my first sexual experience. I wasn't a virgin, and* ***I don't remember when the hymen was broken****. But what I remember when I started thinking about that I had the vague feeling of discomfort that it was my brother when he was baby-sitting me ...*

Una explained that she remembered when the sexual abuse ended more than the beginning of the sexual abuse.

> *Now I kind of* ***remember the finishing of it moreso than when it began*** *because I remember being a teenager and thinking that this isn't normal*

Arla mentioned that she felt that her painful memories were still repressed.

> ***And the painful stuff of course is all repressed.***

She has considered using hypnosis in an attempt to regain the repressed memories.

> *....it's all very vague and you know I have really wrestled for the past year or so with the idea of perhaps using hypnosis* ***to regain some memories of my relationship with my father*** *because I feel I really need to know.*

Repression is a useful coping strategy for women to employ in childhood; especially when there was no way of escaping the sexual abuse. Yet, as indicated by one woman, the retrieval of repressed memories may be especially difficult.

Dissociation and Multiple Personalities

Dissociation was used by one woman to cope with the experience of sexual abuse. Diana described an experience of dissociation when she was sexually abused. She stated:

> *I remember is looking out the window at the farm and* ***looking at my hands and then kind of disappearing****.*

Arla described having another personality called Sue, which allowed her to keep the abuse separate from part of herself.

> *Another thing that actually came out of that work was this* ***real split in my personality****....--* ***my second name is Sue*** *and as a child I never liked that name. I felt very you know who could this Sue be. This is such a horrible name....****It's like Sue is a second personality who sees Arla as a collaborator you see****.*

Multiple personality is a rare and extreme form of dissociation; it is a way of coping with highly traumatic experiences. The experience is fragmented in the person as another personality is created to absorb the trauma (Malmo, 1990). Helene identified herself as having multiple personalities.

> *I don't know when my memories first came back even 7 or 8 years ago I thought even at that point that* ***I must have been one of a hundred people in the world that have multiple personalities****.*

Both dissociation and the development of multiple personalities represent one way women coped with the sexual abuse. In essence, they allowed women to continue living in the world.

Interpersonal Difficulties

Interpersonal difficulties were another area where the negative effects of having been sexually abused were experienced. Walda indicated in the following passage, she was not able to interact with anyone in childhood and adolescence.

> *Because I spent I* ***think most of my adolescence*** *being incredibly and emotionally fragile but also* ***incredibly socially inept*** *because I had spent most of my childhood totally in a shell and* ***not talking to anybody, and not relating****.*

As Walda indicated, her social skills were lacking not because of her desire, but because of her emotional fragility; she was living in a "shell". This is a beautiful choice of words, for animals who have shells commonly retreat into their shells when danger is sensed; it is a way of procuring protection. Walda's retreat to her "shell" ensured her survival.

Mina described her inability to form intimate relationships with other people in the following excerpt.

> *I have sort of come to the conclusion that I* ***have an inability to form intimate relationships****, and particularly long lasting male-female marital type relationships.*

Mina is very matter of fact in her assessment of how she is not able to engage in a long term relationship with a man and appears resigned. Given her past familial relationships, the choice to live as a single person is positive.

One woman reported that a former outcome of being victimized was to become involved in masochistic relationships. Arla stated:

> *During that first -- there were a lot of ways when I was young you know* ***I would become involved in very masochistic relationships....I used relationships I think you know to hurt myself.***

Within relationships Nicola stated that she related to others by trying to earn their approval. Nicola explained how her sense of being a bad person motivated her approval seeking behavior.

> *I think some of that though has been reflected over you know into* ***my adult life sort of feeling*** *really hard* ***like I have to work to earn other's approval and stuff like that. Working really hard to be good to cover up for the badness*** *you know and feel inside.*

Similarly Mina tried to gain approval from others.

> ***And oh, trying to please people. Always trying to look for approval -- any kind of approval or encouragement.*** *Becoming a people pleaser.*

Within relationships, Mina described herself as a care giver, indicating this was how she survived.

> ***Always picked up the flack, but that was how I survived with trying to anticipate other people's needs. I became over nurturing*** *and then I've burned out.*

Assuming an "over nurturing" role in relationships may have helped her to survive, but in the long run, as Mina indicated, she did "burn out". Although, Mina does not give out the details of what occurred, I could only surmise that she gave more than what she received. "Burning out" is a natural consequence of this type of pattern.

Arla described her earlier relationships as compulsive; explaining how she believes her behavior was related to her trauma.

> *That is an incredible difference is that* ***a lot of my relationships in the earlier part of my life****, I firmly believe,* ***were more a result of the compulsion to repeat the trauma*** *than anything else....*

From the preceding section, women displayed withdrawal, an inability to form intimate relationships, masochism, approval seeking behavior, and compulsions in the context of relationships. Of course, sexual abuse occurred in the context of relationships, therefore the occurrence of these behavior patterns is understandable.

Compulsive/Addictive Behaviors

Various types of compulsive/addictive behaviors were reported by two women as means of coping with being victims of abuse. The compulsive/addictive behaviors identified are as follows: substance abuse, eating compulsions, compulsive buying, self mutilation, and compulsive cleaning. Mina identified her drinking behavior was like an alcoholic's drinking habits.

> ***But as an adolescent I began drinking as an alcoholic****. ....By the time I was 18 to 28 I realized* ***I had a problem and I kept trying to quit.*** *Finally I did. I used to drink a lot.*

Mina also identified that she used drugs.

> ***I did a few chemicals -- well mushrooms. I never got into the heavy duty chemicals like M.D.A. or L.S.D.***

Eating binges were also identified as part of Mina's experience.

> ***Or eating binges. You know that's another manifestation of that.*** *Oh sometimes --* ***it was such a compulsion and no control*** *and a lot of times were pastries and sweet things. Sometimes for salty things too and just give me four bags of chips and five dips and whoo.*

Similarly, Arla identified that she had compulsive eating habits.

> ***I certainly still have eating compulsions*** *and that is a way of punishing myself definitely. I realize that.*

Mina explained that she was a compulsive shopper. She explained:

> ***I would go on shopping sprees*** *you know. I was actually surprised I didn't end up in debtor's court or something.* ***I always managed to pay my bills but then I would duck the bill. And every 6 months I usually had a new wardrobe*** *and I would give the rest of it away.*

The self mutilation described by Mina also represented a compulsive behavior pattern.

> *Or like if I had a cut I would just keep scratching it, keep pulling the scab off and it would bleed and stuff like that.*

Leaving things in a mess until her guilt piled up, was for Arla a compulsive behavior pattern. She stated:

> ***...I couldn't clean.*** *I -- you know* ***I would be compelled to leave things a mess until I had to feel so guilty*** *....*

Conversely, Mina stated that she was obsessively clean in an attempt to control her environment. She stated:

> ***Oh man I could clean and clean. Even go into a hotel room, a motel room. It was cleaner when I left than what it was before.*** *That's -- I was obsessively clean. And everything had to be organized.* ***My external environment had to be so totally controlled.***

Compulsive behavior was reflected in Arla's sexual relationships. She stated:

> *And the fact is that for me* ***sexual relationships have always been obsessive, terribly problematic****, terribly terribly problematic. And I* ***don't know if really I will ever be able to be over that****.*

Arla explained that she experienced obsessive thoughts which were sexual in nature. She stated:

> *I had an interesting experience just a few months ago where I suddenly realized* ***I was really overtaken by obsessive thoughts about someone****, and I thought to myself – you know* ***these were thoughts about a sexual nature*** *and an attraction to a person who actually was a friend and I realized....if that had happened to me 10 years earlier I would have simply felt that I was in love with this man.*

Permeating many areas of their lives, compulsive behavior patterns also represented methods for coping with the trauma of the childhood sexual abuse. Luckily, both women were able to become aware of the compulsive behavior patterns.

Body Issues

Three body issues were associated for three women with the experience of being victimized; (a) being preoccupied with one's physical appearance, (b) punishing the self by gaining weight, and (c) feeling uncomfortable with being beautiful were the issues which were associated with being sexually abused.

In the following passage, Una described her experience of being preoccupied with her physical appearance when she was an adolescent.

> ***I'll never be pretty. I'll never be slim or whatever.*** *It just went on and on.* ***I was so hung up on this physical appearance.*** *I haven't really delved inside and thought about what my mind could do.* ***It was all hung on this physical thing for the longest time....And I only thought the way I could get people to like me was to be looking sexy -- men.***

Una was describing a role expectation of being female, which seemed to be exaggerated. Gender roles prescribe that women concentrate on being sexually appealing for the opposite sex (Tong, 1989). However, for Una, this appeared to be exaggerated as she felt this was the only way she could be liked.

Arla experienced guilt in relation to her body. She stated that excessive body weight was a way of punishing herself.

> ***All my life I felt guilty about my body -- you know my physical body. And certainly that's a continuing way that I've punished myself. I've always had this weight problem.***

Another body issue was to experience discomfort with being beautiful. Arla disclosed that she was uncomfortable with being beautiful.

> ***That I was a beautiful child and that's why this happened to me, and that I could not remain --I couldn't be beautiful. I couldn't stay beautiful....I have had periods in my life when I have been very slim*** *and very attractive and you know very sort of sensual looking I suppose,* ***and I can't bear it.***

As some women indicated, negative effects of the abuse were experienced through the body. This is not surprising, for sexual abuse is an act which occurs to one's body.

Difficulty with Sexuality

Four women experienced the negative effects of victimization in terms of their sexuality in three ways: (a) promiscuity or a lack of awareness of sexual boundaries, (b) repressed sexual arousal, and (c) discomfort with sex. Two women described themselves as lacking awareness of their sexual boundaries at various times. Una's description of herself as promiscuous includes a negative judgement.

> ***Because I had been sexually abused and I was promiscuous ....I was being points against me and I kept thinking how horrible I was you know.***

Mina's account of being promiscuous includes guilt and self-punishment.

> *It wasn't until --* ***I was 19*** *when I was raped by a --* ***I was date raped and so when I went to college I became promiscuous and*** *that was* ***part of my self punishment because*** *I --* ***my underlying thought was promiscuous women get murdered.***

Arla described an absence of sexual arousal when she first started to have heterosexual relationships. She stated:

> *When I first left home and* ***started having sexual relationships I just was completely shocked. I felt nothing.*** *I mean it was like* ***my entire body was paralyzed and people had told me*** *this was going to be the* ***most wonderful thing*** *that ever* ***happens to you...***

Three women described feeling uncomfortable with aspects of love-making. Arla felt controlled when she and her husband engaged in sex. She stated:

> *But when* ***that [sex] happened I felt uncomfortable with it....*** *I felt like I was being controlled --* ***that this sexual relationship [with her husband] was somehow controlling me and it wasn't. It wasn't.***

Nicola described her emotional reaction to love-making following a period of abstinence.

> ***It had been months since we [Nicola and her husband] had done that [sex] and we did.*** *And it was okay during the time. I sort of hung in there and I really tried to focus you know my adult self and stuff* ***and yet afterwards when we laid together I just fell apart you know. And I didn't want to show it to him because I thought what's wrong with me you know.***

As Nicola indicated, she felt fine during a sexual activity, but following it she fell apart. She goes on to describe her discomfort at seeing her husband naked.

> *I mean you know even* ***this morning he went into the other room*** *because we have the guest room upstairs* ***and I've asked him.*** *It really is bothersome for me you know if you'd get dressed in the same room right now because* ***anytime I see a penis I sort of freak out....***

In the following quotation, Nadia described her sudden realization of why she would not let her husband fondle her, relating it to her past abuse.

> ***That old bastard [my grandfather] has been in my bedroom from day one of our marriage and*** *even then I didn't put it all together....I was so angry that we had been cheated and* ***two days later the memory came back. He [my grandfather] had managed to fondle me to the point of orgasm. And that's why I could never*** *-- I would* ***never close my legs.***

As the women have indicated, there were several ways in which their sexuality was affected. Such outcomes are easy to understand when they are embedded in the context of the experience.

Powerlessness

The experience of feeling powerless in relation to the abuse was reported by two women. Stephania explained how she now sees herself as powerless as she recalls one of the incidents when she was sexually abused.

> *But one day that summer when* ***my grandfather took me out to the field with my dog*** *and* ***he had a rake in his hand or a shovel*** *or something and I remember* ***him just standing over me and forcing me to try to have sex with my dog.***

She further stated:

> *And know that it was my fault and then I could deal with a lot easier* ***rather than accept how powerless I really was.***

Nicola experienced powerlessness as a little girl when her saying no was never respected

> *I realize now that a lot of that probably came from the* ***little girl who was finding no way out*** *like* ***she really tried hard to get away*** *and to get out from under it but she never won.* ***And her saying no never made a difference.***

The little girl's "no" fell in the abyss of deafness. Experiencing disregard and the obstruction of her attempt to get away robbed the her child self of power.

Walda describes a sense of being powerless as "defeated" and "no way of winning" in a situation.

> ***And I was fighting him off*** *and finally my mother called him and my mother called me and he left and* ***I just wanted to lay there and recover*** *and my mother insisted that I go downstairs.* ***I remember being so tired and so defeated*** *and so depressed because* ***there wasn't any way of winning this.***

Powerlessness is of course a physical reality for children, who are physically less capable than adults. It is also a psychological reality given their dependence on adults. Adults who sexually abuse their children, violate the role of being a protector (Summit, 1983). Deriving their power from their physical size and relationship to the child, an adult or older adolescent who abuses children uses physical power in a manner which exerts power over the child. This of course creates a power imbalance (Tong, 1989).

The effects as described by women, were spontaneously disclosed during the course of the interview. Typically, they varied among women. Moreover, they were not confined to the time period of the victimization, but extended into adult life. It was obvious that some of the negative effects such as multiple personalities, dissociation, repression, self-blame, addictions and compulsions were ways in which women coped with their sexual abuse. Viewing the negative effects from the context of sexual abuse, not only demystifies them, it also clarifies them as coping strategies. Conversely, when the negative effects are isolated from the experience of being victimized, medical or psychiatric conditions are emphasized.

To conclude, this chapter has presented the excerpts of women's stories which provided the essence of the themes of both the "Experience of Being a Survivor" and "The Experience of Victimization". "The Experience of Being a Survivor" was presented first as demonstrate how important it is to consider the whole picture. Much of the literature on sexual abuse concentrated on experiences of being a victim, emphasizing the symptoms that women experience and the details of the abuse. Both "The Experience of Being a Survivor' and of "Being Victimized" are part of the experience. Neither part is more important than the other in describing the total experience of being sexually abused as a child.

V. THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN AS THEY COME TO TERMS WITH THE QUESTION OF WHY THE SEXUAL ABUSE OCCURRED

My second research question sought to understand the experience of women as they came to understand why the childhood sexual abuse occurred; the question was, "What is the experience of women as they come to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse occurred?" My third research question was, "How do women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse experience self-blame?"..I have included the third question at this point as I discovered that the experience of self-blame was part of the experience of coming to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse happened. This became evident as I proceeded with the data analysis, having completed both the writing for the second and third question. So I had to let go of my previous work and deal with self-blame in the context of the experience of coming to terms with the question of why.

While the whole text was used to answer the second question, I used five questions to facilitate the discussion of the women's experience. Three general questions, which focused on why women thought the sexual abuse occurred to them, were asked first.

1). Have you ever asked why me? Tell me why you think this happened to you?

2). When you think about the abuse, what are the reasons which come to your mind?

3). I would like you to think back to when you were a child/adolescent. As a child/adolescent did you ever wonder why this was happening to you? Tell me the reasons why you thought this was happening to you?

If women did not spontaneously state that they blamed themselves for the childhood sexual abuse, then I asked the following questions: "Many women mention at times, that they blame themselves. Have you ever blamed yourself?" and "How have you experienced the self-blame?". I asked the more general question first (number 1 in the above list of questions) so I would not lead women into talking about self-blame if this was not their experience.

The experience of coming to terms with the question of why represented for many women a life long journey which was never fully resolved. It was essentially a description of their lives. One of the women captured the essence of this life long journey in the following excerpt:

> *As* ***I progress through this understanding it's like it's been an ongoing process*** *for me. I really never stopped working on these problems.* ***I have always been working on them in some way or another*** *and* ***my understanding and my awareness and my consciousness of all these things have grown*** *and grown and grown.*

Rich and in depth answers were provided by each of the women as they answered the question of "why?". In fact, the complexity of the answers was unexpected. The answers reflected a progression from thinking in terms of the self or the abuser, to the context of the family and then for a few women the societal context.

A. The Beginning

For three women, trying to make sense out of the experience started in their childhood. As children, the three women did not focus on the sexual abuse, but rather the focus was their lives in general, minus the awareness of the sexual abuse. For example, Arla described how being unable to examine the overwhelming reality of the sexual abuse, she tried to escape from reality.

> ***I don't think I did think about that when I was a child actually, why, no.*** *I don't think I dealt with that [asked why the sexual abuse happened to her as a child] at all as a child. No.* ***I think the reality itself was just so overwhelming and so powerful and so painful*** *and so you know just dealing with that reality was really more than was possible for me even as a child.* ***And when I wasn't dealing with that reality I think that I tried a lot to escape*** *in in various ways.*

Arla explains she was preoccupied with the question of her own existence, reflecting the pain she experienced.

> ***I used to be preoccupied with the question of why I was born to be me, why I wasn't born to be the girl across the street. Why did I have these particular parents?****...*

Arla goes on to explain the meaning of her question, which was embedded in an early experience. At the age of 4 or 5, Arla visited her little girl friend where she saw the girl and the girl's father interact. Arla explained:

> ***The meaning was why can't I be Aasta, you know the girl that lives across the street.*** *I went to her house and* ***I saw her father come home from work and I saw her sit on her father's knee and I knew that it was different.*** *I knew it was different. I knew it wasn't the same. And* ***I was only 4 or 5 years old*** *at that time.*

From this experience Arla realized that her own relationship with her father was entirely different from her friend's relationship with her father.

Similarly, Mina questioned her existence, but not until adolescence.

> *But I guess the why me part probably came most like a question like a daily, concrete sort of* ***question itself through adolescence.*** ***You know why me like -- and even just why was I born.*** ***I never asked to be born, and I certainly didn't ask to be born female you know.*** ***And why is this stuff happening to me.*** *What's the point?* ***Is there a purpose?***

Yet as a child, it was evident that Mina questioned why the "bad things" were happening. She asked God to tell her what she had done wrong. For Mina, the answer appeared to be herself.

> ***Why me and I just can't take this anymore.*** *I remember being very young,* ***even 4 or 5 and I guess at that time*** *I was still naive to believe that there might be a God and praying and* ***asking the God -- him -- to tell me what I had done that was so bad.*** *And I would do what I could to make it better.* ***If he'd only tell me.***

Mina also wanted to be someone else. She stated:

> ***Why couldn't it have been someone else? I wanted to be someone else***. *I looked at all my friends and wanted very much to become them. I guess* ***I used to mimic a lot of behavior in people and dressing style***. ***But I didn't want to be me***. *Because being me was not a good person to be.*

Mina's memories her childhood sexual abuse were not known to her until her adult years,but she did experience various feelings in reaction to the abuse.

> *But maybe* ***at that time not being able to differentiate the different areas*** *that were involved. Like it just seemed -- it was because of* ***this feeling of isolation and emotional devastation was all encompassing***. *And it* ***was that those feelings came out of each experience so since I was feeling the same it had to be something wrong with me***. *But for the -- I didn't realize, until, like* ***I have blocked out the sexual abuse until later*** *-- until adulthood. But not the adolescence sexual abuse I very much am aware of.*

Nicola repressed her memories of the childhood sexual abuse until adulthood, but the experience left her feeling like she was a mistake. She stated:

> *Yes. I think we all do [ask why the sexual abuse occurred] no matter what happens to us. I guess for a long time I probably still do from a little girl's point of view.* ***You know well it was a mistake. I never should have been born. I mean and that's my dad's way of punishing me because I was born.*** *Or I was bad. I mean that's -- I was bad.*

For three women, an awareness that something was wrong began in childhood. However.the experience of trying to survive the abuse necessitated their loss of awareness of the abuse. Coming to terms with the question of why began with a general sense that who and what they were was somehow associated with the devastation they felt. If only I could be someone else or only if I was not born were the beginning points.

For other women, (Stephania, Diana, Nadia, and Walda) the beginning of awareness was not easily identified. The only clear pattern, was that they not did ask why the abuse had occurred in childhood. Stephania explained that she did not question why, since she did not remember.

> ***No. Because I never remember.***

Diana, too, recalls that she could not remember the abuse or think about it.

> ***I probably did, but all I remember is looking out the window at the farm and looking at my hands and then kind of disappearing.*** *So* ***I really can't answer that question because I don't remember it.***

Nadia explained that she felt special.

> ***No I felt very special.***

Walda explained that she did not wonder why as a child because she had a fatalistic approach to her life.

> ***I don't think I ever did. I can remember -- I think I have always had real fatalistic approach to things.***

Pinpointing when the women started to question why the sexual abuse occurred was difficult. Nadia, for example, appeared to start, at a conscious level, in her adult years as she reflected on the negative effects she had been living with.

> ***Funny thing is when I started to reflect on it I realized how much damage was done,*** *dam rights I asked why me? I kind of asked why do I have to go through this hell? Why do I have to remember all those ugly things?..*

Determining when Helene began to ask why was impossible as she did not ask why in her childhood nor did she in her adult life. As an adult she simply assumed the abuse was her fault.

> ***No because I already had it rationalized.*** *You know I already had it rationalized why it was me.*

Even though Helene did not question why, she did attempt to make sense of and explain what had happened to her; during the interview she disclosed that it took 7 years of hard work to move on to another way of explaining why the sexual abuse occurred.

Una illustrated how, without questioning why in her childhood, she later sought to explain why the sexual abuse occurred. In the following excerpt her explanation began with her childhood.

> *But at the time [during her childhood when she was being abused] I've never really delved in and said you know, "How am I feeling now. Is this happening?"* ***You know I just kind of brushed it off each time...***

However, as an adult, Una, sought to understand why she was sexually abused. Una stated:

> ***Yes I blamed them [Una's parents] for a while*** *and then I said, well* ***I can't blame them if they never actually knew it even happened.*** *So if they didn't know -- I actually blamed myself more recently.* ***Not this year but I have blamed myself...***

Una, remembered the event which triggered the blame she felt towards her parents. She stated:

> ***It was probably about 4 years ago*** *when* ***I had watched that television show*** *and saw these* ***women*** *on the television* ***discussing their past life*** *and* ***actually facing their abusers*** *and going up to them and saying, "This is what you did to me. Why did you do it?"*

Arla commented on the insignificance of the question why.

> ***I think as an adult the process of trying to cope with this handicap as it were or challenge ... is more important than why me?*** *The why me isn't -- doesn't -- I suppose for me too what is much more important for me than wondering why this would happen to me is that* ***I could eventually feel that I am as free of the effects*** *of that as possible as it is for me.*

While it was true that the question "Why me?" was not a focal point for some women, most women did, nevertheless, ask many questions about the experience of being sexually abused. The questions varied immensely and appeared to be answered simultaneously as they told their stories. Their questions were in essence attempts at making sense out of what was truly a brutal and horrifying act.

In trying to make sense of this experience, three women, as children, appeared to question their identities or their existence. This appeared to develop out of the devastation they felt or out of the intuitive sense that something was wrong in their lives. The accompanying memories for the origins of their feelings or intuition were missing. As a consequence of their childhood memory loss, the question of why was not directed to the occurrence of the sexual abuse.

Regardless of the relevance for the question as to why this occurred, it was apparent that women were able to provide explanations why it occurred. Most notably, women's thoughts for why the abuse occurred changed through time as they tried to understand the sexual abuse. Their explanations tried to restore the context which had been robbed through such effects as memory loss, dissociation, or secrecy.

B. Providing the Context for the Sexual Abuse: The Explanations

The provision of a context which explained the abuse was not a static process as women moved from explanations which focused on themselves or the abusers, to a focus which concentrated on the family, and for a few women, the focus finally came to rest with the context of society. The starting point of the journey was clearly the self for seven of the women.

Self-Blame as the Context

At some point in their lives, seven out of the nine women began to explain the occurrence of the sexual abuse by blaming themselves. Presented below are their journeys as they moved from self blame, through relinquishing self-blame, to find different explanations for why the sexual abuse occurred.

As a child, Una did not blame herself or feel responsible for the sexual abuse, but as a teenager she did.

> *But at the time I've never really delved in and said you know, "How am I feeling now. Is this happening?" You know I just kind of brushed it off each time so you know I can't really say if I felt really responsible.* ***Not as a little kid of course not. Maybe as an older teenager*** *when you know it became more obvious. Yes. Maybe then.*

At the time of the interview, Una did not blame herself, but just a couple of years ago she experienced self-blame.

> ***No. I don't blame myself now.*** *No there's no blame....Not now. But* ***just more recently like a couple of years ago*** *when I was thinking about it more.* ***I would blame myself because I'd say why didn't I have it in my mind to say this is wrong*** *and stop it because I think when you're a child you don't know you have that ability sometimes.*

Exactly, how did Una rid herself of the self-blame? As Una stated, this was accomplished by physically moving and psychologically removing herself from her family. Una stated:

> *Because I said I decided just to get rid of it you know....****I've removed myself from it by moving away*** *and* ***I'll never be able to be walked on again*** *because* ***I've had so much more building blocks since then*** *that I'm up there now. I'm not at that level anymore....You see I mean* ***I've actually physically moved away in a sense and mentally*** *as well so never again could I feel that way so I don't let it hamper me.*

Arla did not blame herself at the time of the interview, but she did when she first left home.

Her self-blame was experienced both as a feeling and a belief; she felt guilty for being alive and believed that the whole thing was her fault.

> *Only in respect to what I was telling you before that I realized that this point in my life there certainly was a great possibility that as a child I must have invited, to some degree. I mean I don't think a child consciously invites incestuous advance from her parent, but I think I invited his [Arla's father] warmth and his love and his attention definitely. I must have. No. I don't blame myself for that.* ***Certainly I have had to struggle with feeling with a sort of such a deep feeling that it's almost not a feeling that the whole thing was my fault****. Yes. I mean that's been a real struggle dealing with that kind of guilt because my parents I think as I probably made clear by the kind of responses that they gave to me when I talked to them or confronted them, assumed no guilt. They are completely -- they were completely self-righteous in their behavior, and they really assume no responsibility, you know for the fact that there was something wrong with what they did -- at least not to me. And so definitely* ***when I left home I was riddled with guilt. I just -- you know I was sure the whole thing was all my fault*** *in fact, but certainly I have dealt with that over the years or at least tried to deal with it. I don't know if you ever totally get rid of that kind of feeling. It's like feeling marked you know. No. They didn't assume any responsibility really.*

Arla explained that her liberation from the feeling of guilt came from adopting a boarder view of sexual abuse. When she viewed the sexual abuse from the perspective of a family dynamic as opposed to an individual dynamic, she was released from the feeling of guilt. Arla stated:

> ***I focused on myself in that family dynamic as the problem****. I was the problem. And* ***really it was a long long time*** *before I could ever see* ***the whole thing in perspective of a family dynamic*** *and not in perspective of you know that this was my problem.* ***And I think really that was a very liberating thing for me....****It was a long time before I really saw it as part of a whole dynamic,* ***as something that had***

> ***been handed down to me as it were through social interactions with my parents and through their social interactions with each other.***

Mina indicated that self-blame was with her for a long period.

> ***I always felt the fault was mine.*** *I always felt there was something wrong with me like more like what's wrong with -- a lot of it was probably to a greater degree what's wrong with me rather than why me, but they might be the same thing. I blamed myself.*

While Mina was not aware of her sexual abuse as a child, she took on self-blame by believing that she was a bad girl.

> *And then if someone would just tell me what I had done wrong. Like I very much had the* ***feeling that I had been a bad girl.*** *Very bad girl.* ***That I had done something horrible.*** *That oh I figured* ***I was the sin.*** *I was going to hell....*

Mina explained that she studied to try to find out what was wrong with herself.

> ***Like it's not my fault. I used to blame myself and that part of going to school too and studying was to find out what was wrong with me.***

After studying psychology and sociology, Mina relinquished self-blame. Her explanations switched to the family. In response to the question as to whether or not she still blamed herself, she replied:

> ***No I have done a lot of work to work through it*** *and no.* ***I grew up in a sick family.*** *A really sick family dynamic ...*

When asked if she blamed herself, Nicola replied that she should never have been born .

> *I think I did because you know just saying -- because I was born.* ***I mean I never should have been born.*** *I mean that was a mistake and so you know mistakes -- I mean there's a price for being a mistake and so* ***this is the price when you're not wanted that this is what happens.***

As an adult, Nicola no longer blamed herself, referring to the self-blame as "hog wash". She stated:

> *I mean I think of that [the self-blame] as from a child's point of view but* ***as an adult I realize that's hog wash****. But as a child I think I very much felt that I just didn't have it in me to be good enough because if I was I could have made it stop.*

In the following passage Nicola explained why she no longer blamed herself. Nicola stated:

> *I think* ***[my psychologist] has sort of explained this to me*** *that as for a* ***child they're very egocentric*** *and so it's very hard for a child to accept that the world is bad.* ***It's easier to make yourself be bad*** *versus ....the daddy becoming bad because that's much too threatening because the child --* ***I mean if I'm bad as a child I mean that's something that I can control in me versus being out there in the world***

Nicola's understanding was consistent with Summit's (1983) theory of "The Accommodation Syndrome". This theory posits that children will blame themselves instead of the perpetrators in order to sustain the relationship of dependency.

Helene's self-blame was felt in relation to letting the sexual abuse happen. She stated:

> ***I used to think it was you know like there was something wrong with me you know to let it happen.***

Helene noticed her self-blame only as her memories were returning. Prior to that, self-blame was irrelevant because she experienced the abuse as happening to someone else. She stated:

> ***Only as the memories coming back.*** *I haven't -- well when it was --* ***the flashbacks of that I've had of it actually happening -- the thing that is in my head is that I wasn't there....*** *I was always up there watching and it was happening to [another personality]. I had another person that it was happening to* ***so it didn't ever happen to me .....***

Helene stated in response to the question as to whether or not she had stopped blaming herself:

> ***Only about a year ago.***

Leaving behind self-blame was hard work, for this required seven years of therapy. One day, Helene saw a female doctor who helped her relinquish the self-blame. She stated:

> *It only happened –* ***I mean 7 years of therapy and it only happened a year ago ....I found a wonderful, wonderful lady....She is a doctor, regular doctor,*** *and she has just taken courses in counseling as well and in counseling women.....* ***Oh she [the doctor] made me go back and visualize me at all the ages where I had been*** *– at any ages that came back to me. As it happened* ***it was the three ages where I had been abused that came back. She said,...Find that other part and say, can that person forgive and love this little one?*** *"* ***That's what I called her "the little one,: suddenly this 22 year old ...just reached out.....***

Helene found the 22 year old who was, as she termed her, the forgiving part of her personality. It was this part of her personality which forgave the "little one", another part of her personality, for the sexual abuse. She continued:

> *And I remembered her [the 22 year old] clearly and* ***she [the 22 year old] just took the little one to her and loved her and held her and said, "It's not your fault. It was never your fault."***

Helene's new explanation viewed sexual abuse from a societal context.

Stephania stated that as a child she did not remember thinking that the sexual abuse was her fault. As she explained it, she experienced self-blame as an adult looking back at the situation.

> *At the time I don't --* ***at the time of each incident I don't remember feeling like this was my fault*** *or what did I do to get into this situation,* ***but as an adult looking back at that little girl in those situations I think, well how could she be so***

> ***stupid as to go with these people in the woods or wherever or why did she keep going back to her brother?....Like at the time I just remember being frozen*** *but as this less compassionate adult trying to deal with all this stuff* ***sometimes it's easier to think that if only I had done something differently then none of this stuff would have happened which I know isn't the truth....***

As the last sentence of the quote indicated, Stephania knew that she could not have done anything to prevent the sexual abuse.

In an indirect manner, Nadia indicated at the beginning of the interview that she did blame herself.

> ***One of the things that people like myself who have been through this type of abuse have felt that they were to blame....But I think that's where group therapy did so much because all of us at different times in our healing process felt that we were responsible.*** *You know* ***if I had listened better*** *– maybe I could listen even better and maybe this wouldn't be happening to me sort of thing you know....And then the shame that I felt was wrongful shame. The guilt that I felt was wrongful guilt....* ***I could finally learn to turn my mind around and say, "Why am I feeling guilty?*** *Why?"* ***That being able to express it no. No. I am not*** *--and you know the thing is every once in a while something will float through my mind and will go back to that feeling of shame but now I say, no damn way.* ***No damn way. I was not responsible.***

These comments point to the fact that Nadia did blame herself at some point, but no longer blamed herself as an adult.

Each of the women relinquished self-blame and moved on to explain the sexual abuse in different ways. Self-blame was often experienced in childhood in terms of feeling bad or unworthy or as an adult when the memories of the sexual abuse returned. No matter how or where self-blame originated, it was evident that women had to work at incorporating new ways of viewing the sexual abuse in order to negate the self-blame. This was accomplished by broadening the perspective on the sexual abuse from the individual to the context of the family.

The Abuser as the Context

Assigning some degree of responsibility or blame to the perpetrator was another way that women tried to explain why they were abused. Walda, who was one of two women who never blamed themselves, explained why she thought the abuser did what he did in terms of the element of power. Both authoritative and coercive types of power are implied in her explanation. Authoritative power, which is power which one receives as a result of some position (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1981), was implied as Walda's foster uncle was given permission to look after Walda and her siblings. The element of coercive power was present as Walda's foster uncle used his bigger size to overpower her. Walda stated:

> *But in terms of understanding why he did it* ***except that he was given permission*** *because he was sent with us. I don't know just* ***the power*** *then. Because* ***he was bigger and stronger and could do what he wanted to****. I always had the sense that it was like the* ***might makes right in our family.*** *Somehow I never questioned that part of it before that just because he was bigger. I don't know any other way of explaining that.*

As will be shown in the section "The Family as the Context" Walda does relinquish the blame towards her foster uncle, moving on to explain the abuse in terms of her family.

Diana, who was the other woman who never blamed herself, explained that she blamed her perpetrators for the sexual abuse.

> ***I blamed my cousins for it and I have blamed him [Diana's uncle] for it.***

Diana goes on to explain the abusers' behavior in terms of their need for control and power. She stated:

> *Well I think that* ***he [Diana's cousin] needed some sort of control over something*** *because some things was missing in his life so* ***he decided to take it out on me....****Maybe he was – had a* ***great need for power and dominance*** *or* ***lack of self-esteem or something*** *like that. He just decided to assert himself in a less than favorable way I guess you could put it...*

Diana, unlike Walda, does not relinquish the blame she felt towards her abuser.

In the following passages, Arla, Nicola, Una, Helene, and Stephania explained the abuse in terms of the abusers. Recalling the previous section on self-blame, it is also important to point out that these women also blamed themselves for the abuse. However, the explanations which explained why the abusers did what they did, did not represent the major end point of their explanations These explanations were often said in the context of boarder explanations. Arla was an example of this. Arla explained her father, who was her perpetrator, was compelled through his own unmet emotional needs for intimacy to act them out on her.

> *I had to sort of sit down with myself and try and you know and I don't believe that's right because to be very honest with you I think that abusers are not really criminals, and my father didn't mean to be a criminal. I know that for sure.* ***He was compelled....I understand their compulsions because I had to deal with the same compulsions in myself*** *you know.*

Arla further stated:

> ***This was his compulsion in our physical relationship....****It was with this kind of* ***deep emotional intimacy,*** *this profound need for that and I felt like you know through some really --* ***some identification with him that I was living that for him.***

As Arla explained her father's behavior, it was evident that she was trying to provide the emotional backdrop of his upbringing and therefore explain why he was compelled to act the way he did. Arla explained that her father had lost his mother when he was 5 years of age. His step-mother was apparently very cruel to him and, as a consequence, he left home when he was 12 years of age.

Nicola also provided a reason for why she thought her father abused her: he hated her and what she represented, the female gender.

> *So I think for him* ***[neighbor]*** ***it was he got carried away whereas with my dad it was like it was more done in spite like I hate you because you were born*** *and you know so that's why I treat you this way.....****But you know women are sort of very much second class for him****.*

While Nicola offered this explanation for why her father did what he did, she does provide further explanations which concentrate on her father's upbringing. Nicola explained that her father's mother was very dominating, so much so that she drove Nicola's grandfather to the grave. While, her father's parents were very rich, Nicola believed that her father's emotional needs were not fulfilled as a child. In addition to providing a sense of her father's familial history, Nicola attempted to understand what type of person he was. Nicola believed that her father married her mother in order to have a sexual relationship. In fact, Nicola's father had aspirations to become a monk but gave those up in order to have a sexual relationship. Furthermore, he did not want to have children, while her mother did. Nicola, being the second born, was totally unplanned for and unwelcome by her father. Both of her parents had differing sexual appetites; her father had a larger sexual appetite than her mother. Compounding the situation, was the fact that her father considered women to be second class to men.

Similarly, Una's explanation of her brother's behavior was embedded in a discussion of the emotional climate which characterized her family. She described a context of emotional isolation and deprivation she felt; her parents were essentially unable to provide the nurturing she and her brothers required. She also reasoned that sexual experimenting in adolescence was akin to abuse.

> ***I just think that my other family members like brothers had low self esteem themselves*** *were* ***teenage boys maybe deciding to think about experiment with sex*** *and that* ***they thought it was quite normal*** *to you know advance on their sister. I don't know.*
>
> *Perhaps that's why they did that because they were* ***like in their teenage years you know going on about sex -- their body and everything was changing into sexual being*** *and they thought that it was you know that's what they did and you know.*

Helene's explanation of why her abusers abused was grounded in a societal explanation. This occurred following the relinquishment of her self-blame. Helene talked about how the abusers were abused in the following passage:

> ***Every one of the kids and men that abused me were abused. My brother was abused.*** *My friends. Not many of the women were abused. It was most of the boys who were abused. The women were sort of protected and it was because I was always with the boys.*

Helene goes on to talk about how she was not able to blame her brother as she saw him as a victim.

> *So I could never forgive --* ***I could never blame him [her brother] because he was also a victim*** *so it's a very difficult one for me.*

Stephania talked about she held her perpetrators responsible for the abuses they committed against her.

> ***I see each of my abusers as making choices about what they did and that they were entirely responsible for what they did to me.***

Conversely, Stephania explained that her perpetrators, who were also alcoholic, never accepted responsibility for the abuse they perpetrated.

> ***...My uncle was an alcoholic and*** *I don't remember my grandfather being an alcoholic but I do remember there being liquor around the house all the time and* ***so he [Stephania's grandfather] may have very well have been one....***

As all of the women provided explanations for why the abusers perpetrated their crimes, it was evident that the abusers represented only a partial element as to how the women finally explained the abuse. For Walda, blaming the foster uncle represented a former way of explaining why the abuse occurred. She had started to see the abuse in terms of her family structure. For other women, explanations of their abusers were embedded in the larger contexts of relationship dynamics and history of perpetrators.

The Family as the Context

For many women the family became an important way in which they explained the abuse as opposed to earlier explanations which were blaming the self or blaming the perpetrator. For example, Mina, who formerly blamed herself, moved on to explain the abuse in terms of the family. Mina described her family as sick:

> ***I grew up in a sick family.***

Similarly, Arla moved from self-blame to understand the sexual abuse in terms of the family. She explained that the incest was impossible to separate from the family dynamic, explaining that the void in her parent's relationship was filled through the incest.

> ***In a certain sense you know the feeling that I have now is that it's impossible to separate the abuse from the family dynamic that those two things were so intermixed that they actually are the same thing****. And the family dynamic you know in terms of* ***this void that was in my parent's relationship and how they used me somehow to fill that void in a very destructive way*** *-- that is really the incest.*

Nadia moved on to frame the sexual abuse in the context of her family, describing her family as a dysfunctional family, in the sense that there was a lack of love and acceptance.

> *No reasonable explanation as to why except the fact to point out that* ***we were basically dysfunctional families from generations back****.* ***I do not believe that either my mother or my dad in their families of origin were accepted and loved****.*

Walda also came to view the sexual abuse in terms of the family. As was previously mentioned, Walda blamed her foster uncle, but after thinking extensively about the sexual abuse, she identified that the family structure was such that it supported the abuse. Her switch occurred as started to investigate her own family's history, only to discover intergenerational sexual abuse. Furthermore, as she reflected on her grandmother's reluctance to give up the foster boy, who was Walda's foster uncle, Walda started to believe that there was something odd about her grandmother.

> ***I think that for a long time I blamed the boy [foster uncle]*** *but the more I tried to figure out exactly what had happened* ***it seemed like the less I blamed him and the more I blamed the whole family.*** *Because it was the family structure that supported all that and my grandmother in ...If it was just me and if I thought I was the only one involved then I would blame him and only him* ***because as I got into it I found out all the rest of the stuff against the whole family****.* ***There is something very sick in my whole family*** *and so I blame them all.*

This represents a change in Walda's search to explain what happened. Her thinking appeared to be evolving as she was moving to find the context of her family as an explanation.

Nadia explained that her family's general dysfunction was the backdrop for the sexual abuse.

> ***No reasonable explanation as to why*** *except the fact to point out that* ***we were basically dysfunctional families from generations back****. I do not believe that*

> *either my mother or my dad in their families of origin were accepted and loved....I really feel that in our family that's very,very true. I come from a dysfunctional family and* ***I believe [my husband] and I created one*** *because that's all the role models we have....*

As Nadia indicated, she recreated the dysfunction which was originally in her family of origin.

Diana provided an explanation which focused on her extended family: this was the type of family where multiple types of abuse were perpetrated.

> *If they [Diana's aunts and uncles] weren't all mixed up and a lot then it never would have happened you know.* ***If they [Diana's aunts and uncles] weren't sexual molesters and psychological abusers and violent people who hit their children then it never never would have happened.***

Apart from demonstrating how it was that some women progressed to view the family as an explanation for why they were abused, women spent a great deal of time talking about their families. All of the women provided a sense of what type of family they had been raised in. This included descriptions of their mothers , fathers, and descriptions of the patterns which had occurred through many generations of their family.

Mothers

Within the context of describing their families, women described their mothers. Many of the women talked about the burden of their mothers as they carried the load for their husbands who were absent either through alcoholism, work, or from illness. Many women also talked about their mothers' impediments for the provision of nurturing.

Arla talked about the psychological abuse she felt as a consequence of her mother's lack of love and persecution.

> ***My mother was a very depressed and unhappy person I think she blamed me....I don't believe that my mother was ever able to love me.*** *In fact* ***she treated me with quite a degree of hostility*** *I think, and certainly as a child I was*

> *very aware of that....**she was mean to me**. That she wasn't loving. In fact, I think you know when I was -- I don't know how old I would have been -- **I probably felt that she persecuted me that she wanted to**. That **she tried to find reasons to punish me** you know.*

Not only was Arla's mother not able to love her, but her mother also persecuted her through punishment. Arla felt a lot of rage towards her mother and released this when she first left home. Arla provided an insightful analysis as to why her mother was unable to love her: apparently,her maternal grandmother was forced to raise her siblings after her own mother died. Arla believed that her grandmother continued resenting the role of being a mother even when she had children of her own. Arla described her grandmother.

> *Her mother was the oldest of I think four children and when she was 16 her mother died and at the time she was going to school I think in England because her family was living in British Guyana. **She was forced to come home at the age of 16 and take over the family and I think that my grandmother hated children really and I think she probably very much resented having to do that** -- having to take over this family at the age of 16. **And I think that was very clear in the way she brought up her own children [Arla's mother].***

Arla continued to tell how her own mother carried on the pattern of resentful child rearing. She felt her mother's rage was directed towards her and what she represented, mainly that of being a female. Arla stated:

> ***I think my mother you know, like me at the age of 18, 19 or 20, I was just full of rage,** and for me I found a way of authenticating it and letting it out and **I think my mother's rage was all turned against herself. And it was turned against me too probably just because I was a female.***

The rage of being female was unspoken, but Arla clearly felt this rage from her mother. Arla recalled how at the age of 9 or 10 her mother set her up to spend a lot of time with her maternal great uncle who had abused her mother. Arla's mother was clearly unable to provide an environment which protected Arla.

Una also provided a very detailed description of the type of nurturing her mother provided. Una's mother was not able to give direct rules or codes for her children to follow. Instead she resorted to the use of examples from the news as a way of telling her children how to behave.

> ***What my mother used to do she could never really tell you things personally*** *and say, "You know I really don't want this to happen to you. I love you," and all this stuff. Never very expressive. She could just --* ***she would read something out of the newspaper just in the middle of the air like you were supposed to take that and say, "Okay. I understand. Don't take drugs or you know don't have sex with anyone because you are going to get whatever."*** *And* ***she would just read it aloud*** *and she did that so often that it would annoy us you know and we would just shut off from that because they would say, "Look. Did you read this." And she would start reading something.* ***"My oh my," you know. Like that. She never really said it to you like she wanted you to know or listen....***

Una explained that her maternal grandmother had been the mistress of a man who was very cruel to her mother and her siblings. Her mother experienced emotional deprivation, which became the pattern she followed in nurturing her own children. Una described her mother's history in the following excerpt:

> *Because* ***my mom said she's the way she is because her mother never showed her any love and she never ever told them she loved them and their father worked away and he had another wife.*** *Like* ***her mother was actually his mistress type thing and he had three children by my mom's mom and the children were treated dreadfully.*** *They were never shown any love or affection.*

Una described how old her mother was when she gave birth to Una. Being the youngest of six, Una was also raised by an older sister, who was often mistaken for her mother. As Una went on to describe her mother's marital life, I sensed that Una's mother was taxed to the limit in terms of coping with six children and a temperamental husband. Una described her mother's martial life as one where secrets were kept from her husband. In addition, catering to her husband's demands assumed a major part of her mother's marriage. Additionally, Una's father was very ill and as a consequence Una's mother had to raise Una and her five siblings by herself. In the following excerpt Una described her mother's life:

> ***My mom has kept so many secrets from my dad because she doesn't want to stress him out because he's been in the hospital with heart trouble. He's been sick all his life like she's just catered to him always.*** *He's had tuberculosis, bronchitis.* ***When she had two young children he was in hospital for 18 months on his death bed*** *-- that type of thing. She's never wanted to get him in a panic you know.*

Una's description of her mother provided the backdrop which explained how Una's mother was unable to protect her from the sexual advances of her brother. In addition, Una, describes that she was emotionally starved as an adolescent. No doubt Una's neglect and consequent need for attention partially contributed to her brother's success in sexually assaulting her.

Like Una's mother, Mina's mother had many children, eight including Mina. It appeared that Mina's mother was primarily responsible for raising the children, as her father was alcoholic and frequently absent from the home due to drinking. Mina described her mother as being burned out. It is not difficult to imagine that Mina's mother had very little in terms of emotional resources to give to her children. Mina described her mother's situation in the following passage:

> ***He [Mina' father] just doesn't come home every weekend but you know lots of cases of beer or wine or whatever the hell else down in the basement.*** *Oh that* ***secrecy****. A lack of communication between any family members.*

> *Strict authoritarian rule, disciplinarian. Abuse.* ***My mother being burned out***. *She could barely keep herself going through day to day.* ***How could she notice anything about her kids you know?*** *It was sad. I mean sort of well, do you blame her or feel sorry for her you know.*

For a period of time, Mina blamed her mother for not protecting her. However, it is notable that Mina does not blame her anymore, since she came to understand what sort of marriage her mother had. Her mother told her she hated sex, so Mina felt she couldn't speak of the abuse. Mina's father, did not respect Mina's mother, providing little in the way of support to her.

> ***I really blamed my mother. I was very angry at her for not protecting me*** *from my father and from my grandfather. And then I realized how could she ever have known and* ***I could never have told her. That family dynamic***. *I mean* ***my mom told me at a very young age that she hated sex*** *and that in itself is a type of abuse. So how could I talk to her about being sexually molested?*

Compounding the situation, was the way in which her family dealt with issues such as alcoholism. That is her family kept issues hidden through secrecy.

> ***Everything was secretive. No, dad doesn't have a drinking problem. He just doesn't come home every weekend*** *but* ***you know lots of cases of beer or wine*** *or whatever the hell else down in the basement. Oh that secrecy.*

Given all of the factors which Mina described about her family, it is apparent that Mina could not tell her mother that she had been sexually abused. Mina certainly did understand this.

Helene recalled how her mother had to run the farm, while her father was ill with tuberculosis. In addition, her mother also was very nurturing, taking care of anyone who appeared to be needy, and expecting no support from men. Helene stated:

> ***Mostly tuberculosis and he (Helene' father) was in and out of a sanitarium all his life*** *and he had other things wrong with him as well. He died quite young....* ***but it was my mother that ran the farm and looked after us and***

> ***looked after him and looked after everybody's abandoned children*** *and you know like everything... and men were only good for physical -- to build things and to fix things and to dig the fields and that and to bring in the money. That's all they were good for but they were useless.* ***But you had to look after them because men are the chosen ones. Women are just the vessels to assist them....***

Helene in no way blamed her mother for not protecting her from the sexual abuse. She does appear to understand the type of conditions her mother had to contend with.

Similarly, Stephania was aware of the hard life her mother lived as she raised five children by herself while her husband worked out of town. Stephania was aware of the emotional exhaustion which her mother probably felt.

> ***My brothers and sisters and I were all born within 4 years of each other so my mom had five kids in 4 years, and my dad often worked out of town so I'm sure my mother was quite overwhelmed and exhausted most of the time.***

Unlike Mina, Helene or Stephania's mothers, Nicola's mother did not have to contend with alcoholism, illness, an absent husband, or raising a large number of children. Nicola was one of two children, the second born. Nicola stated she was raised in a middle class home, her father was employed as a professional, and money did not seem to be a problem. What was notable in Nicola's description of her mother, was the type of relationship which existed between her and Nicola. Nicola strived to be the perfect daughter all of her life. As a child she was an "A" student, great in sports, and went on to University to become a professional of high distinction. In the following passage, Nicola described how her mother did not support her as she started to recall the childhood sexual abuse.

> ***See I can accept her for being a whole lot less than a perfect mother. I mean she tries as best as she could but if I am anything less than the perfect daughter, boy you know I get tossed out real quick....****And I think*

> *because it hurts so much inside for the little girl who feels a lot of shame, who feels dirty, who feels like why was I ever born. You know all those questions and* ***now to feel that real rejection from someone who she thought really loved her has been hard****.*

What Nicola was referring to was the unrealistic expectations her mother had of her, expecting Nicola to recover quickly from the returning memories and resume her life as if nothing had happened. Nicola disclosed to her mother the abuse she endured from a neighbor, failing to risk disclosure of the sexual abuse she experienced with her father. At first her mother accepted the disclosure, but after a time Nicola's mother telephoned in an hysterical manner. Nicola described the conversation in the following passage:

> *So well* ***she started to scream on the phone*** *and she said, "****This isn't true. I knew every moment of your childhood where you were****." And all this kind of stuff and she totally spazzed out on me. I held the receiver away from my ear and the kids just kept saying, "Who's that on the phone?"*

Some time later, Nicola received a letter from her parents with material on the False Memory Syndrome. Nicola described the correspondence she received in the following passage:

> *...I came back home ...they [Nicola's parents] had* ***sent a whole envelope of this stuff from the False Memory Syndrome Society*** *or association so they [Nicola's parents]* ***wrote in their letter about this was an enormous blessing and it was a real answer to their prayer****...and* ***they now realized what was wrong with me*** *and that this - they were getting a lot of support and a lot of council from them so that* ***sort of blew me away****.*

Nicola appeared to be shocked when she received information on the False Memory Syndrome.

Six of the women talked about their mothers in the context of why they their mothers were not able to protect them. Elements which were reflected were their mother's exhaustion from having to assume all the responsibility of caring for children and the house or their inability to assume the role of a nurturing and protective mother. None of the women blamed their mothers at the time of the interview, although it was obvious that at one point some of the women did.

The survivors' accounts of their mothers demonstrated the restrictions and expectations which were placed on women. The restrictions were primarily economic as few choices were available forcing women to assume roles they did not want. The expectations are gendered, assuming that simply because one is a female they want to or are skilled enough to raise children. Gender expectations also assumed that women would assume sole responsibility for parenting.

Patriarchal Patterns

The sub-theme or patriarchial patterns emerged from the data independent of any inquiry that I made. It was an important sub-theme for it demonstrated the type of domination which women were subjected to. The men in the women's families were often angry or violent, objectified females of any age into vessels of sexual fulfillment, and appropriated the labour of women.

As was previously mentioned, Mina's father was alcoholic, providing little support to Mina's mother in her child rearing. Her father behaved in sexually exploitative manner towards her mother. As Mina stated in the following passage, her father regarded her mother as a sexual object, displaying a lack of concern for her when she nearly died in child birth.

> *I mean my mom told me at a very young age that she hated sex and that in itself is a type of abuse. ...You know she just hated sex. Sex was dirty.* ***That's all my father wanted. She was just a piece of meat. He had no respect for women. I mean she almost died giving birth to one of my siblings and my father spent the time in the bar.***

It would seem as if Mina's father dominated Mina's mother as her mother experienced sex as abusive and hated it. This was significant as it was Mina's father who also sexually abused her. Her father's needs appeared to take precedence.

Although, Walda was not sexually or physically abused by her father, she stated her father's attitude was one of a patriarchal ownership towards her.

> ***He [Walda' father] always had an attitude.*** *I can remember him saying to my mom and I was very angry about it when he said it and he was laughing so he thought it was funny. "**What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine too.**" And it went – I just realized in the last month through my therapy and stuff and something that my brother told me about the way he looks at me now that I am separated – my dad, not my brother.* ***My dad has always given me the sense that he thought he owned me. He owned my labour in a marxist sense*** *– that he – that I owed him you know, that sense.*

While this is a less obvious type of abuse, it still is abusive in the sense that her father did not regard her as a separate person, independent of him. Walda's existence was being defined by her father: he thought he had the right to own her and her labour. Walda's sense of not being treated as an separate person was probably reinforced by the sexual abuse which Walda's foster uncle perpetrated.

Nicola stated she was not regarded as a wanted child by her father, and he did not appreciate the female gender generally; he regarded women as second class. Apparently, her father and mother had different sexual appetites; her father's appetite exceeded Nicola's mother's appetite. This, in of itself, is neither good or bad. However, Nicola implies that her father thought she was an appropriate sexual object and stand in for her mother. What was abusive about Nicola's experience was that she not only endured sexual abuse from her father but it was apparent that her father did not regard her with the same favour as he did her brother. This was psychologically abusive in that it imparted a powerful message to Nicola about her value and position in the world as a female.

> *...you know* ***my dad very much wanted to be married for having a wife and the sexual part of his life fulfilled*** *and* ***my mom married to have kids.****...And*

> *my mom very much you know triangulated with me and my brother and my dad was very much scared off and so it was really – I think that led to a lot of* ***frustration on his part because this wife who he'd married to you know have this sexual fulfillment was no longer really available to be very sexually fulfilling****. She was focusing a lot so I think that directed some anger towards and resentment especially towards me.* ***Sons and stuff are always really important to my dad because they are the name bearers and all that so my brother can do no wrong. But you know women are sort of very much second class for him****.*

From Nicola's description of her father and his attitude towards her, it is possible to gain the sense that Nicola felt that the sexual abuse was an expression of the anger that he felt towards her.

Helene described her father as an angry man who she always expected to kill someone. She stated:

> ***I always expected him to kill somebody because he was always angry*** *about everything that had happened and to his life and he was a real hermit and he was laded with this wild gregarious wife and this huge family and people all the time around us.*

Four out of the nine women identified patterns which demonstrated paternal dominance, dominance which exerted power over others and as a consequence diminished the rights of others. Nicola's and Mina's fathers' attitude in particular, that women are only sexual objects, could be best described as misogynist, that is, women hating.

Intergenerational Patterns of Sexual Abuse

The sub-theme of intergenerational patterns of sexual abuse refers to the presence of sexual abuse in the previous generations of eight women. As well, in the case of one woman, the generation which she procreated subsequently abused others and in another case, a woman's brother who was abusive to his daughter.

Diana talked about her experience of sexual abuse in the context of her extended and immediate family of origin, reiterating what she had been told by her mother. Her mother's story was that her brother, or Diana's uncle, tried to sexually abuse her, and that her cousin, who was Diana's perpetrator, may also have been abused.

> *Because I **know my mother told me that my uncle – her brother tried to do something like that to her but she didn't give me the whole story so she said he didn't do it and she took off.** But she said it probably happened to him [Diana's cousin].*

Diana proceeded to explain that sexual, psychological and physical abuse were present in her extended family. It was obvious that Diana blamed the sexual abuse she experienced on patterns of abuse which were in her extended family.

> *If they [Diana's extended family] weren't all mixed up and a lot then it never would have happened you know. **If they weren't sexual molesters and psychological abusers and violent people who hit their children then it never never would have happened.***

Similarly, Arla learns that her mother was sexually abused by her uncle. The disclosure occurred after Arla returned home for the first time in 15 years for a wedding, when they were alone. This particular disclosure was ironical as many years ago, Arla had confronted both of her parents about the sexual abuse. Her mother's response to Arla's disclosure was a blaming one, acting as if Arla had willingly engaged in the sexual abuse.

> *During that time **my mother for the first time told me that she had been sexually assaulted as a child by one of her uncles** which of course by that time was no surprise or shock [to Arla]. It was uncanny I suppose the way this had happened because I had confronted my parents earlier after going through psychiatric treatment and their response was very unsupportive.*

Arla continued to comment how strange it was that her mother disclosed this information to her, knowing that she had blamed Arla for the sexual abuse. Complicating this scenario, was the fact that Arla knew that her father had also sexually abused her younger sister. After the initial confrontation, Arla's mother warned her father to leave her sister alone. Her mother then took a protective stance towards her sister, but did nothing to try and repair her relationship with Arla. Arla gained this information from her sister, who she visited after she had left home.

> *....At one point I went back [home] and I made a point of seeing my sister and of course I know my sister was incested as well because I saw things and I heard things when I was growing up. ...At first she denied to me that it had ever happened to her and* ***then she told me that after I left my mother had said to my father that if he ever touched her she would leave him. And after I left*** *[home]* ***my mother had taken an approach whereby she never ever allowed my father and my sister to be alone together so of course her life was changed dramatically as a result of the fact that I had confronted my parents.*** *Funny enough, of course,* ***the impact of it wasn't to bring her any closer to me. But it repaired or it made it possible for my sister and my mother to actually have a relatively closer relationship***

Walda talked about the pattern of intergenerational sexual abuse in her family. Following her own disclosure to her parents, Walda's parents disclosed their histories of childhood sexual abuse.

> ***I told my parents about it [her childhood sexual abuse] when they found that I was sleeping with my fiance. And ...we just told them bluntly everything that had ever happened to me*** *and they kind of said, "Well, yes we kind of knew something was going on but we didn't know what to do about it."* ***And it came out that they [Walda's mother and father] had both experienced abuse in their childhoods....So they were so conflicted they couldn't deal with it [Walda's childhood sexual abuse].***

Not only were Walda's parents both victims of childhood sexual abuse, but Walda's paternal aunts had also been sexually abused by her paternal uncle. She stated:

> *I don't know because like I said I can't go past -- I can't go back past why my* ***uncle did it to my aunts****. It is just like* ***nobody ever in the family ever said it was wrong*** *until I did or until my brother did when he went to my parents.*

As Walda has mentioned in the above passage, no one in her family had ever said it was wrong to sexually abuse one another. Walda termed the intergenerational abuse "a generation virus", and postulated her theory of the origin of sexual abuse in her family.

> *So to me it just seems like a* ***generation virus in our family*** *that we were next in line.* ***Something about the way the family chose to handle their sexuality*** *because like I said nobody saw themselves as being particularly attractive and nobody worked at being attractive.* ***And yet there is this undercurrent through the whole family and so it is like somewhere along the line things got off on the wrong track and got distorted and abnormal, perverted.***

Walda talked about the sexual abuse in terms of the family, as opposed to the perpetrators, portraying that the sexual abuse constituted a choice about the way sexuality was handled.

Intergenerational sexual abuse was also present in Nicola's family. Her paternal aunt was sexually abused when she was a child by a 12 year old farm boy. In the following passage, Nicola told of her aunt's abuse, the way her cousin told her during a visit.

> *She [Nicola's cousin] said, "And it was a year and a half ago my mom [Nicola's paternal aunt - her dad's sister] in the middle of this conversation that we were having about something or other said, well you know were out at the farm and there was this* ***12 year old farm boy and you know he abused me [Nicola's aunt] for about 3 years when we were out there.****" And she said, "She never talked to me about this before."*

Stephania's mother was also a "survivor" of childhood sexual abuse. However, it was not clear who the perpetrator was as her mother denied the involvement of her own family. Stephania described her mother's status as a survivor:

> ***And my mother is a survivor herself. I remember when I first had memories I asked her has it happened to her and she said, "Yes." And for the last years she's kind of waffled about it and saying, "I know it happened."*** *But she says it was never ever anybody in her family and that it was people that worked on the yard and so she's never really dealt with it or admitted it.* ***And I think the fact that my mother survived this sort of thing too and never dealt with it, didn't give her the resources to deal with it when she saw things going on with me****.*

Although, Stephania's mother does not incriminate anyone in her family, Stephania's perpetrators were closely related to her mother. They were Stephania's mother's father and brother. What is noteworthy, is how unmerciful Stephania's grandfather and uncle were towards her both in terms of the type of acts they committed and in the number of incidents of sexual assault. Her grandfather made her engage in beastiality, and her uncle inserted objects into her vagina. Knowing that both her grandfather and uncle were sadistic, it does make one wonder if Stephania's mother's perpetrators were the same people that perpetrated the sexual abuse towards Stephania.

Nadia's family provided an account where three generations were touched by sexual abuse. Nadia was abused by her grandfather, her own father abused three of her nieces and her own son abused her daughters. In the following excerpt, Nadia reiterated how she discovered that her own father had sexually abused three of her nieces. She stated:

> *And then one night I was downstairs -- she [Nadia's daughter] was nursing the baby and* ***she [Nadia's daughter] said, "Mom who abused you?*** *Which grandfather was it? Was it your dad's dad or your mother's dad? I* ***said, "No, it was my dad's dad."***

> *And she looked at me and she said, "That figures." I said, "What do you mean that figures?" "Well," she says, "It's no wonder." "No wonder?"* ***"Yes," she said, "Your dad is the same dirty old bastard that your grandfather was."*** *I said, "Oh God, not that."* ***She said, "One of my cousins was abused by your father****....And then it's October of 1991 and* ***I have a conversation with my sister-in-law*** *and ...then* ***she admitted not only one, but all three of her daughters had been abused by my dad****. Oh, man I was so angry.*

In the following excerpt, Nadia recalled how she found out that her own son had been her daughter's perpetrator.

> ***And she [Nadia's daughter] said, "I've been in therapy for child sexual abuse.****" And I thought, oh God. I can't even begin to describe the feeling I had...."Hey man after my grandfather and my father who the hell could it be? Anything is possible."* ***"No" she said, "Our older brother."*** *At that moment my whole world -- everything until then seemed possible.*

Nadia described how three men, who were family members, sexually abused their female relatives. This was clearly traumatic. It does however, provide an example of how intergenerational sexual abuse was passed through successive generations. Nadia's hope for her grandson's generation is for a dissolution of the destructive patterns. Learning how to communicate, meet each others needs, and breaking the code of secrecy were some of the ways Nadia had already changed her own family.

Una's sister-in-laws alleged that her father had made sexual advances towards them. Her school friend also reported that Una's father had made sexual comments towards her. Una commented:

> ***She [Una's sister-in-law]*** *just never thinks what she says and then she* ***made allegations once that my father was making sexual innuendoes towards her and my other sister-in-law had said the same thing....And one of my***

> ***school friends also said that my dad made comments to her in the park once because we have dogs and they walked the dogs.***

Helene's account of intergenerational abuse involved her brother, who was her perpetrator. Although, Helene's brother did not remember his abuse, Helene suspected that he was abused by a uncle and a gang of neighbours.

> *But he [Helene's brother] was attacked and held down by the same guys that raped me. They also got him because he was a good boy too you know when he was really little. And there is some other incidents that he doesn't remember* ***but we think there's an uncle that hurt him [Helene's brother]*** *and you know like so we don't know.*

Helene's story of intergenerational sexual abuse does not stop with her brother, for Helene disclosed that her brother abused his daughter. She was hopeful that his daughter would not continue the pattern of sexual abuse as she married her therapist. However, her hopes were arrested when she thought of her brother's son as he appeared to be capable of perpetrating.

> ***My brother has abused his daughter.*** *I know that their children won't be abused so perhaps it's ended with them because* ***she married her therapist****. His daughter married her therapist and so it's not going to happen. So their both very you know very committed to and I've talked to them about it so and there's no way it's going to continue at least in their family, but* ***I do believe that one of my brother's sons will abuse****. I am sure just from looking at him.*

Eight of the nine women identified previous generations that were sexually assaulted. This information was offered as part of the women's explanations for why their own sexual abuse occurred. In psychoanalytic terms, Alice Miller certainly would think of this patterning as strong evidence for how destructive patterns of child rearing are passed from one generation to another (Miller, 1990). In most cases, women represented the victims, while men represented the perpetrators. In a structural context, it is obvious that men appear to repeat the abuse of power in sexual relationships through successive generations.

As feminists have observed, women do think in terms of relationships more than men do (Tong, 1989). It is of no surprise, then, that all of the women explained the sexual abuse in terms of the family. Family explanations represented a significant proportion of the women's story and explanations. Only portions of the explanations could be provided, and of course, by grouping experiences together in order to describe common experiences, many explanations which centered on the family are lost. As was demonstrated, the women talked about their fathers and other male family members as perpetrators, about their fathers as dominant, about their mothers as unable to protect them, and about intergenerational abuse in association to their own sexual abuse.

The inclusion of the family as an explanation for why sexual abuse occurs is essential in gaining a holistic understanding of sexual abuse. As was demonstrated, familial explanations exposed key patterns which allowed women to understand the abuse. Without these explanations women's understandings are incomplete. These familial explanations are clearly important and represented end-points in explaning the abuse for some women. For others, the process of searching for explanations continued and they made sense of their abuse in an even broader context.

Society as the Context

Societal explanations were offered by two of the women as reasons why they thought they were sexually abused. After leaving behind self-blame, societal explanations represented a major shift in how these women explained what had happened to them. Mina provided an in depth explanation which stressed the need for change in our society. More specifically, she stressed the need for a different way of structuring interpersonal relationships because gendered roles are problematic. Mina stated:

> ***What happened to me is a product of our culture and from that thinking our culture needs to change. Something has to change.*** *You know people can't treat people this way....* ***It's a cultural phenomenon.***

> *The sociological perspective that* ***it's a capitalist, patriarchal patrilinial exploitation****....You know a lot of it and like the difference in* ***gender roles said men not being encouraged to be expressive and express their feelings*** *and to be vulnerable....the one emotion they (men) can express is anger and* ***they are supposed to control people, control the children, control their wives and the whole idea of wives and children as a man's property****....And it's* ***interpersonal relationships need to become greater focused*** *than making money and the so called American dream. You know possessions are nothing if people don't interact properly*

Helene's explanation was very general; she stated that sexual abuse occurs because the world is sick and everyone as been abused. Helene assumed that if the world was not a sick place then abuse would not occur. Helene stated:

> ***Because it is a sick world. Because everyone was abused.*** *And if we look back -- if I think back on the other people that I know that were abused they're pretty certain that the person -- their abuser was also abused. The people that I am close to now -- there's plenty of others that I haven't talked to about but the few that I talk to now and I would say that it's --* ***if our abusers were abused then we can assume that their abuser was an abuser and that it's going to go on and on and on and on unless I don't know****.*

Helene's conclusion was that abuse will "go on and on and on and on" if not stopped.

Two women were able to take their experience of sexual abuse and move from explanations which focused on themselves and their families to explanations which placed the experience of sexual abuse in a much larger context. This societal context serves to explain how the family is structured to mirror an ideology which has enforced the sexual domination of women. A sense of continuity is provided, giving way to the illusion of a time limited mishap of a family or of an individual that goes astray. So much understanding is lost when sexual abuse is confined to the present and viewed only in terms of the victims or abusers. In the context of society, the question then becomes how does society prevent, deter or stop sexual abuse? The question is very pertinent to the family, where privacy effectively isolates such acts.

In summary, the experience of women as they come to terms with the question of why represented a healing journey whereby self-blame was relinquished. The beginning was, for some women, a feeling or intuitive sense that something was in their lives and in themselves. Self-blame was experienced at various times by the women, but all women eventually relinquished the self-blame. As they continued their exploration they broadened their perspective and came to understand the abuse from within a wider context. For many women the wider context represented their families; for a few women the wider context became society.

VI. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The road I travelled in the world of inductive research had taken me a long distance. Now weary, I sought to find a place where I could rest and reflect. Looking down the road I spotted a bench on the side of the road,with a sign which said "Rest Area". Walking towards the bench, I knew that this was exactly what I needed. Sitting down on the bench, my thoughts turned inward as I started to reflect on this long journey.

Recalling my starting point, I remembered that I started out with three questions. From my own experience, as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I knew that very little research described the experiences of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. So my first question, a very general question, asked for a description of the experiences of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The second question, a more specific question, was derived from the sparse amount of literature, and asked for a description of the experiences of survivors as they came to terms with the questions of why the sexual abuse occurred. The third question, the most specific question, asked for a description of the experiences of survivors as they blamed themselves for the sexual abuse.

Not knowing what I would find as I started to search for the answers, I was surprised by what I discovered. In fact, my discoveries were both personal and academic learnings. The following chapter begins by discussing my academic learnings and then concludes by discussing what the study has given to me, personally.

A. Academic Learnings

The academic learnings which resulted from the study were numerous. In fact, I was overwhelmed with the different types of experiences which emerged from the study. It was obvious that women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse have a wealth of different types of experiences. This section summarizes the research results, compares the results to other research, and discusses the implications of the research results. Clearly, one of the important findings of this thesis was that two dominant themes emerged which captured the essence of the lives of women who had been sexually abused as children. These were the distinct experiences of "being victimized" and of "being a survivor". It is clear that both of these experiences are parts of the whole experience for women who were sexually abused in childhood. With a couple of notable exceptions (Hutchinson & McDaniel, 1986; Lepine, 1985; Kondora, 1993; Women's Research Center; 1989), previous research has focused on the symptoms, problems, and the "pathology" of being victimized (Alter-Reid et al., 1986; Finkelhor & Browne,1988; Hanson,1990). A second contribution of this research is the understanding of how women come to terms with the question of why they were sexually abused. It is clear that women do not make simple, static attributions for the sexual abuse in the way some previous research would suggest (Heath, Donnan & Halpin,1990; Morrow, 1991). It appears that answering why they were abused is an ongoing process for the women in this study. Initially, they mostly blamed themselves. Later they may have attempted to attribute blame to the abuser, and finally they moved beyond these simple attributions to more complex explanations of why they were sexually abused as children. These complex explanations were embedded in the context of particular family dynamics, patriarchal male dominance, intergenerational patterns and society. The understanding of the process by which women came to terms with the question "why?" makes a significant contribution to our knowledge.

In the following, the experience of being a survivor is first summarized and discussed, followed by the experience of being victimized, and finally the experience of how women came to terms with the question of why is summarized and discussed. The last section discusses directions for further research and the implications of these findings for the clinical community.

The Experience of Being a Survivor

The first question sought to find a description of the experiences of women who had histories of childhood sexual abuse. Themes which characterized women as being survivors, emerged from the data. I was excited to see these themes emerge as the experience of being a survivor appeared to be an aspect which research had missed.

The experience of being a survivor consisted of first becoming aware of the abuse through labelling, knowing, and remembering the abuse. Once women became aware of the experience, the difficulty of accepting this as reality became apparent; with the exception of those who used labelling, women initially did not accept the abuse as reality. This theme was called believing. Once the reality of the abuse had been accepted, women connected the symptoms and memories back to the original events. This theme was called making connections. Women also engaged in periods of healing work where they attempted to deal with some of the effects of the abuse such as: rage, negative patterns of thinking, self-blame, withdrawal, repression, and unworthiness. Other themes which emerged were women's commitment to the healing process, the turning point of stopping the abuse, and deriving personal meaning from the abuse. Finally, moving on was represented as women sought to move beyond the effects of the sexual abuse.

A model as proposed by Lebowitz, Harvey, and Herman, (1993), outlines three stages in the recovery from sexual abuse. The first stage involved the establishment of safety. The second stage involved remembrance of the event(s), integration, and mourning of the losses which women experienced. In essence, this means that women in this stage seek to fill out their life story and connect their feelings to the emerging memories. The third stage involved reconnecting with others as relationships were redefined and restructured. I did not seek to find the stages of recovery as they were outlined by Lebowitz and associates. However, certain aspects of the stages as proposed by these authors were reflected in the women's stories. Following is a discussion of how elements of the stages of recovery, as outlined by Lebowitz and associates (1993), fit with some of the themes which emerged from the present study.

The theme of becoming aware of the sexual abuse, which emerged from this study, fits with the second stage of the model as proposed by Lebowitz and associates (1993) (remembering, integrating, and mourning). Women, in this study, talked about becoming aware of the abuse experience by remembering repressed memories, through labelling and through intuitive knowing. Similarly, Kondora (1993) found that remembering the event(s) of childhood sexual abuse emerged as a central theme from the stories of incest survivors and as such it allowed for the possibility of transforming the abuse.

The theme of making connections, which was another emergent theme from this study, was also reflected in the second stage of Lebowitz and associates' recovery model. In this study, the theme of making connections represented how women connected their feelings or behavior patterns back to the original event. Similarly, in the second stage of Lebowitz and associates' (1993) recovery model, women worked to link memory and affect together.

The theme of working through, which emerged from this study, appeared to be reflected in the second stage of Lebowitz and associates' (1993) recovery model. A major component of the second stage was healing the effects of the abuse, as was the case for the theme of working through.

The theme of stopping the abuse, which was another emergent theme from the present study, was also reflected in the third stage of Lebowitz and associates' (1993) recovery model. In this study, the theme of stopping the abuse represented how women stopped the abuse in their lives as adolescents as well as how women were later committed to seeing the cycle of sexual abuse end. In Lebowitz and associates' third stage, it was hypothesized that women sometimes take on a survivor mission, which means they are committed to either helping other survivors or stopping the abuse. For the women in this study who became committed to stopping the abuse in their families, it was apparent that this could be represented as a survivor mission.

The theme of deriving meaning, which was another emergent theme from this study, was also reflected in the third stage of Lebowitz and associates' (1993) recovery model. In this study, the theme of deriving meaning represented how women discovered their own strength or how they discovered that they perceived or understood the world in a unique way. Lebowitz and associates hypothesized that women transformed the trauma by creating meaning. Similarly, both Draucker (1992) and Lepine (1985) have found that women construct meanings which reflected the strength they developed in having gone through the experience. In addition, Draucker found that women constructed meaning from their sensitized ability to relate to the pain of others, the realization that they now understood the cause of the sexual abuse, and their increased self understanding.

The theme of moving on, which was another emergent theme from this study, was reflected in the third stage of Lebowitz and associates' (1993) recovery model (reconnecting with others). In the present study, the theme of moving on represented the transformations which occurred in women's relationships, self concepts and sexuality. It is apparent that elements of the theme of moving on are contained in the third stage of the recovery model.

In summary, certain elements of the themes of being a survivor were reflected in the clinical and research literature. The experience of being a survivor is an area which is beginning to be acknowledged by the research community and I hope that it will be an area where more research will be directed.

The Experience of Being Victimized

In addition to the themes of being a survivor, themes emerged which characterized women as having been victimized. Originally, I did not plan to describe the experience of being victimized, as it appeared to be an aspect which other research had concentrated on. In fact, I believe my own bias motivated me to ignore this aspect. My bias originated from the damaging labels which had been bestowed upon me in my own personal journey of healing. However, as I continued with the data analysis, it was obvious that this was an essential part of the women's stories and, therefore, I was compelled to describe the emerging themes. Three themes emerged from the experience of being victimized: these were the losses, the aspect of objectification and devaluation, and the negative effects.

The losses which women experienced were many and included the loss of one's childhood, the loss of an opportunity to develop a personality which could have been free of the impact of the sexual abuse, the loss of fulfilling sexual and emotional relationships, the loss of the chance to achieve one's potential, and the loss of valuable time. Women were often aware of how their time trajectory was off track. For example, women were frequently not able to complete their education until later years. No matter what the losses were, it was obvious from the way the women described their losses that they wondered what their lives might of been like had they not experienced the sexual abuse. These were the named losses, but what of the unnamed losses? The unnamed losses includes the past generations of women who did not achieve and become all that they could have been. This is not an individual loss, but it is a collective loss for society.

Loss is a subject which is well known to the psychology of grief and to clinicians who work in the area of childhood sexual abuse (Meiselman, 1990). Clinicians can testify that with the recovery of memories of childhood sexual abuse, women may face the extent of their losses and they come to understand exactly what it was that they lost (Engel, 1989). According to Lebowitz and associates (1993), women who face their losses may be sustained through this period as they start to create new meanings, or as they gain some sense of hope. With the exception of this study, research has not described the type or the extent of the losses which survivors experience. Further research in this area would illuminate the extent to which this is experienced by other women who have histories of childhood sexual abuse.

The second theme of objectification and devaluation demonstrated how the perpetrator regarded the child in a way that diminished her status as a human being or literally regarded her as an object and treated her as such. This is an aspect of victimization which is often forgotten. The most powerful and unforgettable example from this study was of the woman who was left on pile of laundry in the basement; an image which speaks to how she was devalued by her abuser.

The experience of victimization was described from the viewpoint of the women who experienced childhood sexual abuse. The women described experience which, in a sense, diminished their value as human beings. Women were aware of how they were treated. However, it is unlikely that perpetrators were aware of how the experience felt for the victims. From the perpetrators' point of view, the objectification of children was done simply to satisfy their needs. How this happens is explained by Smith in her book The Everyday World as Problematic (1987).

According to Smith, women have not been part of the class which created knowledge. The position of women, particularly in sociology, has been one where the study of society and of social relations does not proceed from the vantage point of women, but rather this occurs from the vantage point of men, who are not even aware that this is occurring. Smith explained that this was similar to the type of consciousness which was generated between a master and slave. The master was only aware of their desires and the object of their desires and had little concern for the slave who had to satisfy their master's desire.

Speaking from the field of psychology,Kaschak in the book, Engendered Lives: A New Psychology of Women's Experience (1992), noted how psychology has managed to fragment and strip away the context from women's experiences. The political reality of their oppressive condition is hidden due to the fragmentation and specializations of the field. Certainly, I did not want to strip away the context and actively sought to illustrate the context. The political reality of the women who were abused as children was such that objectification and devaluation of their gendered status as females were simply part of the experience of victimization. In addition, an exploration of family context revealed that men were dominant and oppressive generally, as well as being perpetrators. in other words relations were structured in such a way that men were the oppressors.

A third theme related to the experience of victimization were the negative effects. Women experienced the following negative effects: (a) emotional reactions which included depression, (b) self depreciation and self-hatred, (c) self-blame, (d) memory loss which refers to repression, (e) dissociation and multiple personalities, (f) interpersonal difficulties, (g) compulsive/addictive behaviors, (h) body issues, (i) difficulties with sexual relationships, and (j) powerlessness. There were many ways in which being sexually abused effected the lives of the women who were involved in this study. The list is simply overwhelming.

In regards to depression, seven out of the nine women mentioned that at some point they experienced some sort of depression. For two of the seven women, depressive patterns represented life long patterns. Herman's study of women who experienced father-daughter incest demonstrated that 60% of the women experienced symptoms of major depressive illness (Herman, 1981). Although I did not categorize the different types of depression which women experienced, it does appear that the women in this study experienced similar rates of depression to that described by Herman. This is not surprising in light of what happened to the women and to their socialization to be feminine. Depression is a socially acceptable way for women to feel, and expressing anger is generally not allowed. Perhaps depression is a safe way of surviving in a world where anger in women is not tolerated.

Women also reported experienced other intense negative emotions. Three out of the nine women experienced intense anger, fear or guilt. This is higher than the 17% of women in Russell's study, who reported that they experienced negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, fear and mistrust (Russell, 1986). The difference in incidence may be attributed to the differences in sampling; Russell's study was a community survey, whereas this study was not representative of the population.

In regards to the negative effect of self-hatred or self-depreciation, eight out of the nine women described, at some point, these negative effects. In comparisons to Herman's study, where 60% of the women in her study were described as having a predominantly negative self-image (Herman, 1981), the women in the present study had a higher rate of self-depreciation. The difference may be attributed to the indepth nature of this study which allowed for greater exploration of some experiences.

Self-blame was also a common negative effect for the women who volunteered for the study; seven out of nine women at some point experienced self-blame. For these seven women, self-blame was described in relation both to valued aspects, such as beauty, and despised aspects, such as flaws in characters. Women also blamed themselves for having associated with the perpetrators and for not stopping the abuse, despite the fact that as children they could not have escaped from their perpetrators who were family members.

Self-blame has been documented as a negative effect in other studies. In Jehu's study of 51 women who entered the University of Manitoba's treatment program, 86% of the women who experienced childhood sexual abuse had engaged in some sort of self-blame (Jehu et al., 1988). Whereas, 12% of incest victims who participated in Russell's experienced self-blame (Russell, 1986). The results of this study were comparable to Jehu's study, but not to Russell's study where a lower incidence of self-blame was reported.

Memory loss through repression was also experienced by eight of the nine women. It was obvious that many women utilized this defense mechanism while they were children. For some women, repression continued to be utilized to block memory for some of the events of their childhood. Many clinicians (Engel, 1989; Meiselman, 1990) and researchers (Russell, 1986) describe how this is a very common way that children and women cope with sexual abuse.

Dissociation and multiple personalities were also experienced by women in this study. Two women, who experienced very traumatic abuses, multiple incidents of abuse, and multiple perpetrators, displayed multiple personalities. This is certainly consistent with what was described in the literature (Malmo, 1990).

In regards to the negative effect of interpersonal difficulties, women expressed that they were unable to have long term intimate relationships, were involved in masochistic relationships, were unable to have friendships as children, or they sought approval in the context of relationships. Five out of the nine women in this study experienced this negative effect, while only 12% of Diane Russell's sample of incest victims experienced this effect (Russell, 1986).

Compulsive or addictive behaviors were experienced by two of the nine women who were interviewed. This is comparable to the 35% of women in Herman's study, who reported addictive behaviors (Herman, 1981).

Body issues were discussed at some length by two of the nine women. One woman who reported that she was preoccupied with physical appearance, punished herself by gaining weight, and the other felt uncomfortable with being beautiful. The frequency of negative perceptions related to body issues reported by women in this present sample is considerably lower than the 74% of women who reported negative or distorted body perceptions in Westerlund's (1992) study of incest survivors.

In regards to the negative effect of having difficulty with sexuality, four out of the nine women experienced either an absence of sexual arousal or discomfort with some part of the sexual act. This is comparable to the 55% of women in Herman's sample who experienced sexual problems (Herman, 1981). However, this is lower than the 100% of women in Westerlund's study who stated their sexuality was negatively affected by the incest (Westerlund, 1992).

The negative effect of powerlessness was experienced by three of the nine women. For one woman, the feeling of being powerless generalized throughout her life. In the study conducted by Russell (1986), some of the women who experienced incest mentioned that they experienced powerlessness during the abuse, but numbers were not given.

Overall, the women who volunteered to participate in the present study appeared to experience the same sort of negative effects in roughly the same proportion as did women in other studies. Negative effects have been largely researched in the literature predominantly from the medical model. Sadly, the medical model addressed symptoms as indicators of pathology. While it is true that the symptoms were not often very pleasant, and they were associated with many disorders, symptoms (the negative effects of the abuse) can be viewed as mechanisms which allowed women to survive the abuse. This is a principle of feminist therapy originated by Sturdivant and cited by Malmo (1990) in the book Healing Voices: Feminist Approaches to Therapy with Women. Within the feminist perspective, symptoms of abuse are seen to be coping strategies or survival mechanisms (Malmo, 1990).

Not only is it important to view the negative effects within the context of the victimization, but it is equally important to view symptoms in the context of societal structures and conditions. To illustrate, I will use an historical example. Ehrenreich and English (1981) have provided a rich analysis of how upper class men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries idealized the sick role for upper class women. Medical doctors were in a sense creating their own business, as rich women could pay for their services. These women were said to suffer from a grave illness which originated from their reproductive organs. Women did, indeed, suffer; many experienced depressive disorders. However, the source of their pathology was oppression, not their reproductive organs as physicians of that time surmised. What does this have to do with women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse? The point is that illness is in a sense socially constructed. When problems such as depression, sexual difficulties, and multiple personalities are viewed in the absence of the context from which they arise, an ideology which holds the individual responsible for the problem, (i.e., which victimizes the victim) is reinforced. Attention is drawn to the individual woman through a process of labelling, diagnosing, and treatment, while the perpetrator is largely left alone.

My point is not to minimize the efforts which have been made by feminist therapists, for they do work very hard at restoring the health of women who seek therapy in part by putting it in context. My criticism is in reference to the structure of a system which has penalized the victims instead of the perpetrators. Empirical research has minimized the context and focused most of its attention on the pathology of the victim. My study avoided this problem using a phenomenological approach and asking women to tell their stories, allowing women the opportunity to describe the circumstances surrounding their experiences of abuse. In addition, my value system and beliefs incorporated a societal framework. This perspective prevented me from minimizing the context.

In summary, women's experiences of being victimized included the losses they felt, the the aspect of being objectified and devalued, and negative outcomes . The aspect of negative effects are the most widely documented aspect of women's experience. Less research has described the losses women suffered and the experience of objectification and devaluation. Further research describing these aspects of survivors' experience would be beneficial.

The Experience of Coming to Terms With the Question of Why

The second question sought to find a description of the experiences of women as they came to terms with the question of "why?" The themes which emerged as women came to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse occurred essentially represented a process which sought to provide the context for their experience of childhood sexual abuse. The experience of self-blame represented one of the ways in which women explained why the sexual abuse occurred. Women moved from explanations which focused on themselves or the abusers, to a focus which concentrated on the family, and for a few women, the focus finally came to rest with the larger society.

In regards to the theme which represented self-blame as a way of explaining why the sexual abuse occurred, seven women initially explained the sexual abuse in terms of the self. This was of course only a starting point, for women moved on to view the family or society as an alternative way of explaining the sexual abuse, as they developed psychologically and/or as they got more information.

What was notable was that no one blamed themselves for the sexual abuse at the time of the interview. Rather, self-blame represented an initial explanation, either originating in childhood or arising as an adult when women initially remembered the sexual abuse. Later, after therapy, educational courses or exposure to television programs and books on the subject, women were able to recognize how self-blame was an erroneous explanation.

Self-blame did not appear to be associated with any positive effects, for women described self-blame in the context of depression and compulsive or addictive behaviors. Each women provided many reasons, some of which were contradictory, as to why they were to blame. The reasons for blaming the self varied. Most women appeared to blame themselves for either being compliant or for failing to stop the sexual abuse. Self-blame appeared to represent a way of making sense of a world which had severely harmed and betrayed the women. Self-blame did not stand alone, for it existed in within the evolution of explanations women sought to explain why the sexual abuse occurred.

Previous research has more or less treated self-blame as a static way of perceiving or explaining why the sexual abuse occurred. In fact, the majority of research has focused on the question of adjustment in association with two different types of self-blame, that is of behavioral self-blame and characterological self-blame. For adults, what is known about behavioral and characterological self-blame, is that both types of self-blame were associated with poor adjustment outcomes (Hoagwood, 1990). In regards to the two types of self-blame, we know that children do not appear to distinguish between the two types of self-blame (Hoagwood, 1990). Women in this study did not appear to distinguish between different types of self-blame as was theorized by Janoff-Bulman (1979).[6] The two categories of self-blame appeared as artificial distinctions, with self-blame appearing to be experienced in a general way.

In regards to the theme of the abuser as the context, two women, who never blamed themselves, initially blamed their abusers. One woman, who provided the abuser as an initial explanation, relinquished the abuser as the explanation, moving on to explain the abuse in terms of her family. The other woman who did not relinquish the abuser as an explanation, had only just started to remember her abuse.

While two women initially explained the sexual abuse by focusing on their perpetrators, it was evident that many other women provided explanations for why the abusers perpetrated their crimes. It was evident that these explanations were provided as the women explained the relationship dynamics or the history of their families.

How does the theme of the abuser as the context compare to other research? Morrow (1991) found that approximately 33% of adolescents who experienced childhood sexual abuse explained the sexual abuse in terms of the perpetrator. Another study, which used the Jackson

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[6] Janoff-Bulman theorized that characterological and behavioral self-blame were distinct expressions of self-blame. Characterological self-blame, was attributed to uncontrollable aspects such as one's character, while behavioral self-blame was attributed to controllable aspects such as one's behavior.

Incest Blame Scale, a scale which determines if the offender, victim, society or situation are blamed for sexual abuse, was administered to a sample of 40 women who had experienced incest (Heath et al.,1990). According to the results, incest victims blamed the offender the most, society second, the situation third, and themselves the least (Heath et al.,1990). Finally, Hoagwood (1990) found that women who blamed the perpetrator were less depressed than were women who blamed themselves.

Both this study and the aforementioned studies have noted that blaming the abuser was related to women's explanation of why the abuse occurred. Although previous research has portrayed the explanations as being static; it was obvious that this was not the case for the women who participated in this research study. Explanations which focused on the abuser, represented both initial explanations and ones which developed later. The difference in the results are likely due to the differing methodologies. Empirical studies do not allow women to provide long and detailed answers as to why they thought were sexually abused. In contrast, the answers which women provided in this phenomenological study were embedded in the context of the stories which they told about their lives.

In regards to the theme which provided the family as the context for explaining why the sexual abuse occurred, all of the women who participated in the research provided explanations which involved their families. Three sub-themes emerged as women disclosed their stories and explanations for why the sexual abuse occurred in their families: (a) patterns of patriarchal dominance, (b) the mothers who were either overworked or were emotionally unavailable, and (c) patterns of intergenerational abuse.

In regards to the first sub-theme of patriarchal dominance, four out of nine women described attitudes or behaviors indicative of the ways in which the fathers dominated their families. Two women described how their fathers were sexually and emotionally abusive to both themselves and other female members of the family.

In many ways, the women in this study described similar paternal patterns to those described by the women in Herman's study. However, Herman reported in greater detail what the fathers were like as her study specifically questioned women in this area, whereas I did not. For example, Herman reported that the women described their fathers as authoritarian heads of the house who were good providers (Herman, 1981). Furthermore, fathers held rigid gender roles and, not surprisingly, this was reflected in the privileges which males were accorded and in the higher valuation of male children. Herman stated:

> ...Boys in the family were given more freedom and privileges than girls, or were excused from household chores. Some families paid for the education of their sons but not their daughters. One daughter recalled that with each of her mothers numerous pregnancies, her father proudly informed the relatives that his wife was expecting a boy (Herman, 1981, p. 73).

The pattern of according greater privileges to males as described above does mirror structural patterns which are present within all types of institutions, even if the patterns were exaggerated. This is obviously a part of the way our society has structured relationships. However, what is not obvious is childhood sexual abuse, because the secrecy which has surrounded it, largely kept this reality hidden. Childhood sexual abuse represents one more way in which males have dominated females.

The pattern of dominance was illustrated in this study by the fact that, with the exception of one perpetrator, all perpetrators were male. This illustrates how male perpetrators use their power to sexually exploit females. Furthermore, men's socialization discourages the expression of personal vulnerability (Lisak, 1991), and this, it seems, sets the stage for the disregard men have for the needs of women and children.

In regards to the second sub-theme, how women perceived their mothers, the women described why it was that their mothers were unable to protect them. Often their mothers were overburdened with many children and much work, had physically sick or absent husbands, and as a consequence were unable to provide the nurturing that children required. Herman similarly described the mothers of the women in her study. She stated: "Economically dependent, socially isolated, in poor health, and encumbered with the care of many small children, these mothers were in no position to challenge their husbands' domination or to resist their abuses" (1981, p. 78). Herman provided an explanation for why mothers put up with oppressive conditions. Similarly, the women in my study explained why their mothers were unable to protect them.

Finally, in regards to the third sub-theme of intergenerational sexual abuse, eight out of the nine women described intergenerational patterns of sexual abuse within their family, providing a sense of the cycle of childhood sexual abuse. For the women in this study, intergenerational patterns were an integral part of their families legacy. Further, that they were able to explain that other family members, especially women, had experienced sexual abuse both in past and subsequent generations, helped them to move forward from a position of self-blame.

Previous research has not described the intergenerational nature of incest. Reasons for an absence of this theme from other research may reflect the relatively recent emergence of women who are brave enough to tell their stories of childhood sexual abuse. Such candor is historically still in its infancy, hardly providing enough time for women to explore its occurrence with other members of their family. As younger generations of women go on to raise their own families, research may be able to document such patterns.

The three sub-themes of patriarchal dominance, mother's who failed to protect their children and intergenerational patterns of abuse were explanations which the women provided to explain why the sexual abuse occurred to them. In essence, these three sub-themes, illustrating the family as context, were part of the women's stories about themselves. In coming to terms with the question of why the sexual abuse occurred women needed to put the sexual abuse into some meaningful context as they let go of the self-blame.

Two women provided an even broader context for explaining why the sexual abuse occurred: their explanations focused on society. Both women replaced former explanations, which blamed the self, with the societal explanations. Interestingly, both women were educated in either anthropology or sociology, and this in part may explain why they relinquished self-blame to societal explanations. This in no invalidates their explanation, but merely presents how valuable it can be for women to be exposed to new information which they can integrate with their personal experiences.

In summary the experience of coming to terms with the question of why the abuse occurred led to a search for the context of the sexual abuse. The context was initially identified as the self or the abuser, but later women incorporated their families as an explanation for why the sexual abuse occurred. For two of the women, the context was identified as society.

Implications of the Findings

What can be generalized from this study? First of all, it is important to remember that the purpose of phenomenology is to describe the essence of a phenomenon. The study described the experience of how nine educated women were able to come to terms with the experience of being a survivor, the experience of being victimized and the question of why they were sexually abused. Many themes that emerged from this study have been documented in the literature, and this provided additional validity to what emerged. However, the emerging themes from the present study do not provide explanations which seek to support or disprove a set of assumptions. Furthermore, the study can not be generalized to other women as the sample constituted a very small number of women who do not represent the population of women who have experienced intrafamilial childhood sexual abuse. This is not intention of phenomenology.

Although this study has limitations as all studies do, the study does make a significant contribution to the literature which describes the experience of women who have histories of childhood sexual abuse. First, this research revealed that the women's lives consisted of the experience of **being a victim** and of **being a survivor**. These findings suggest the need to explore both aspects in order to put the experience of incest into balance. Neither aspect should be separated, as both aspects make up the experience. This finding represents a very important contribution that this study has made to the literature.

The second significant contribution of this research is the revelation of the process by which women relinquished self-blame and adopt more complex explanations for why they were sexually abused as children, explanations which focused on the abuser, their families, or on society. To my knowledge, this has never been described. Clearly, self-blame represented a way in which some women initially explained their experiences as children. However self-blame did not appear to be experienced in a manner which distinguished between characterological and behavioral self-blame.

A third contribution of this research, is that it clearly demonstrates the value that phenomenology or qualitative approaches can have in lending understanding to the area of child sexual abuse. Much of the previous research I reviewed proceeded from an empirical, quantitative model and concentrated on a very narrow part of the experiences of women,documenting negative effects. A new direction in the world of research is required to further elucidate the experience of surviving the abuse. For example, very little research has been done to determine how important it is for women to create new meanings in order to integrate abusive experiences.

A fourth contribution of this research is the holistic manner in which the experiences of women were presented. That is, this research described various aspects of women's experiences in relation to one another. This prevented a fragmentation of their experiences. Previous research has focused on pathology of women and, as such, misrepresents the experience of women as it excludes other aspects of their experiences. Only one aspect of women's experiences are the negative effects.

There are many other areas of survivor's experiences that have never been described. For example, the experiences of women who have moved beyond or healed from the sexual abuse have never been described. Likewise, the experiences of older cohorts of women as compared to younger cohorts of women have not been described. Similarly, we have few descriptions of the experiences of women who have never undergone therapy,or of the intergenerational patterns of sexual abuse in families. Additionally, we know very little about the different ways in which women start to remember their sexual abuse. Finally, the process of recovery has been described in theory, but it has not been described through research. Simply, there are very many areas which require further research, and the present study represents only a small part of the research which still needs to be done.

What sort of implications do the results from this study have for the professional helpers? First of all, it is hoped professionals including my own profession of nursing, will be able to recognize that the themes which represented the experience of victimization are complemented by the experience of being a survivor. The importance of assuming a broader perspective is that the negative effects or symptoms do not remain the focus. The focus can switch to the process of surviving the experience where symptoms such as addictions, multiple personalities, dissociation, or self-blame are viewed as creative means by which women survived and functioned.

Secondly, much to the credit of feminist therapists, professionals now have very skillful techniques which are designed to assist women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse recover; that is, to remember and integrate the abuse and reconstruct their lives. Additionally, the results of this study suggest that therapy which illuminates the broader societal context of abuse would help women gain a context for their abuse. And, in fact, this is exactly what feminist therapists do in consciousness raising, whereby they assist women to view societal conditions which have contributed to their experiences of victimization.

Thirdly, for therapists working with adult survivors of abuse on the issue of self-blame, implications for treatment arise from what appears to be a sequential process of trying to explain what happened. The findings of this study suggest that, the goal of treatment should not simply be the provision of accurate cognitive perceptions, but rather the goal can be to assist women to explain the abuse in terms of the context from which it abuse occurred.

B. Personal Learnings

What did I learn, personally? From the women who participated in the study, I learned about courage and hope. Their courage was unlike the courage which heros can publicly display; it was quietly displayed as the women continued on in their lives, going beyond what they had suffered. The hope was displayed in women as they dared to envision a family or society where abuse would no longer take place.

By far my most valuable learning was when I realized that the women in this study also reflected parts of my journey. Of course, there are differences, but the essence of the emerging themes described parts of my experience. This is indeed a gift which is beyond words. The more I reflected on this work, the more I knew that it was not just a research study. It represented a working through and letting go of what I had held on to for so many years.

To conclude, the words of Nicola appear to be most meaningful:

...Because I don't just want to survive. I really want to live. I really want to live fully...

It is my deepest hope that all survivors will live fully.

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APPENDIX A

ADVERTISEMENT USED IN THE EDMONTON EXAMINER

STUDY ON CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

is being conducted to discover how women describe their experiences. If you were sexually abused when you were under 18 years of age by a family member, and would like to participate in this research project, please call Ann at:

488-0857

APPENDIX B

POSTER

STUDY ON SEXUAL ABUSE

It is estimated that one in 3 women have been sexually abused.

It is the voice of women who have been sexually abused who can bring understanding to this critical social issue. I am conducting a research project through the University of Alberta to discover how women describe their experiences. If you were sexually abused when you were under 18 years of age by a family member, and would like to participate in this research project, please call Ann in the evening between the hours of 5 to 9 pm. on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday at:

488-0857

In the event that you are unable to call between the hours given, an answering machine will take a message. The message will only be heard by me.

All inquiries are confidential

If you would like to validate the study call Dr. Berna Skrypnek at 492-0192

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM INFORMATION

CONSENT FORM INFORMATION

Title:	•How do Adult Women who have experienced Father-Daughter Incest Explain the Sexual Abuse.
Investigators:	•Ann Hemingson, BSc., R.N. (488-0857) •Dr. Berna Skrypnek, Ph.D. (492-0192) (Advisor)
Purpose:	•Is to describe the explanations that adult women who have experienced father-daughter incest provide to explain the sexual abuse.
Procedure:	•One interview session of 2 hours in length is probably all the time that will be required. However, if the interview takes longer than originally anticipated, we can arrange another time to finish the interview, if you wish. You are not required to do any writing. The interview may be conducted at your home or at the University of Alberta in Assiniboia Hall. If neither of these locations seems to be comfortable for you, another meeting place will be arranged.
Side Effects:	•The initial question which seeks to gain information on the nature of the abuse and the extent of the abuse may be upsetting for you to recall as this is traumatic for most women. •You are to be treated with sensitivity and respect. If the interview becomes too upsetting we will stop.

CONSENT FORM INFORMATION (Continued)

Confidentiality: •With your permission the interviews will be taped. The tapes will be transcribed, (this means typed), by me, Ann Hemingson. After typing the tapes, the tapes will be destroyed. All names and any other information that might identify you will be deleted. There are two people involved in the study, myself and my advisor. We are the only people who will have access to the information. We are bound by professional ethics to keep all information confidential. Any publication of the results of the study will be done by using only quotations which will not reflect the individual identities of any of the participants. We are bound by university regulations to keep the typed transcripts locked away safely for a period of 5 years. The typed transcripts will be locked away in a filing cabinet which is located on the University premises. Thereafter the information will be destroyed. In addition, you do not have to give your real name to us.

Time Commitment: •The interview will take approximately 2 hours of your time.

Withdrawal: **•As your participation is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice.**

•If at anytime you feel uncomfortable with continuing we will stop.

Research Results: •You may write or phone us for a copy of the research results. The address is:

Ann Hemingson or Dr. Berna Skrypnek
3-38 Assiniboia Hall
Department of Family Studies
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2M8
Telephone: 492-0192 or 488-0857

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

I acknowledge that the nature of this study has been described to me and that any questions that I have asked were answered to my satisfaction. I have been provided with an information sheet on the study and have read it. I understand that I am being asked to participate in one interview where I will be asked to respond to the interviewers questions. I understand that the interview will require 2 hours to complete in total. I understand that the interview and testing will be completed at my home or at the University of Alberta at my convenience. I have been assured that my responses during the interviews will be confidential.

I understand that I may keep a copy of the information sheet and this consent form, and I know that should I have more questions at any time, I may contact any one of the people involved in the research:

Dr. Berna Skrypnek (Ph.D.)	492-0192
Ann Hemingson (BSc., R.N.)	488-0857

I understand the risks and discomforts of the research study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to myself. I understand that I will receive no payment for my participation.

______________________　　______________________

Signature of Participant　　Signature of Researcher

____

Date

APPENDIX E

FINAL INFORMATION SHEET

FINAL INFORMATION SHEET

I want to thank-you for your participation in this research. It is appreciated as I know how valuable time is. In addition, the research would not of been possible without your help. So thank-you for the gift of your time and your experience.

If you like the results of this research please feel free to contact me at:

Ann Hemingson or Dr. Berna Skrypnek
3-38 Assiniboia Hall
Department of Human Ecology
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 2M8

Sexual abuse experienced as a child may leave one with many questions, thoughts or feelings. It can have an impact on the quality of one's relationships or on the way in which one has patterned their life. Then again it may have not affected one's life in a significant manner. In any event no matter how you have experienced the sexual abuse, if you feel the need to explore any issue in a supportive context, then there are a number of agencies which provide professional and supportive counselling services.

APPENDIX F

RESOURCE LIST

RESOURCE LIST

Sexual Assault Center

#400 MacDonald Place

9939 Jasper Ave.

Edmonton, Alberta

423-4102

Services:

1. **Crisis Line**- Offers 24 hour service for survivors of for those who have been assaulted in the past or present. Call 423-4121
2. **Counselling services**- Individual counselling service for those in crisis.
3. **Group Therapy**- Offer a series of counselling groups on short-term basis. For example a group will run for once a week over a duration of 8 weeks.

Personal Development Center

15108-76 ave

Edmonton, Alberta

T5R-2Z9

487-6492

Services: Provides a variety of services for the general public which include personal counselling, family counselling and educational, life enriching programs. **Two groups are of relevance to individuals who have experienced sexual abuse (or commonly referred to as survivors)**. One is the **Male Survivor Treatment Group** and the other group is the **Women's Survivors Therapy Group**.

Distress Line

Edmonton Alberta

482-4357

Service: Offers a 24 hour crisis line for those individuals who need someone to provide support.

Catholic Social Services

8815-99 st

Edmonton, Alberta

432-1137

Services: Offers counselling services to survivors as well as intensive weekend workshops for women who have experienced sexual assault.

Private Therapists

There are a number of therapists who are skilled in counselling women who have experienced sexual assault. The Sexual Assault Center has complied a list of qualified therapists. Therapists will differ in their fees and approaches. Finding a therapist who you feel comfortable with and one who you feel is competent is difficult. For further information about therapists skilled in dealing with sexual assault contact the Sexual Assault Center at 423- 4102.